

POSITION STATEMENT ACCESS TO MEDICINES

All people living in Canada should have equitable and timely access to necessary prescription medications based on the best possible health outcomes rather than the ability to pay.




Health
Charities Coalition
of Canada Coalition canadienne
des organismes de bienfaisance
en santé

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ADDRESSING ACCESS TO MEDICINES ISSUES IN CANADA

Drugs are an integral part of our health care system. 90% of Canadians with chronic conditions take at least one prescription drug and 54% of Canadians with chronic conditions take four or more.¹ Prescription drugs can manage conditions, cure disease, improve quality of life, shorten or prevent time spent in hospitals and reduce demand for health care services, potentially leading to positive health outcomes and decreased costs for the healthcare system.²

Yet, more than one in five Canadians report having difficulty paying for prescription medications without insurance and one in 10 Canadians have difficulty paying for prescription medications even if they have insurance coverage.^{3,4}

Many do not have insurance because they are self-employed, or are working on contract or part-time.⁵ One third of Canadians employed full-time, and three quarters of part-time employees have no insurance for prescription medications.⁶ In addition, many drug plans provided by employers have maximum coverage thresholds and a limited range of therapeutic options, so even those covered by private insurance sometimes find the options available to them do not meet their needs.

Inequities also exist between provinces, disease groups and health care settings. For example, chemotherapy has historically been administered intravenously in a hospital or medical setting with public payers covering costs. Many of the new cancer therapies are pills (solid, oral dosage), which patients can take at home. In many provinces, patients who take oral medications must incur partial or full costs depending on whether they have insurance coverage and what costs are covered by a public drug plan.⁷

The Health Charities Coalition of Canada (HCCC), which represents 30 national health charities, applauds the federal government's recent announcement to join with the provinces and territories, by participating in the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance, to increase the negotiating power of public payers in Canada. Through collective negotiations, Canada may be able to reduce costs to the healthcare system and increase access to needed medications, so that Canadians have an opportunity to achieve their best health outcomes.

Though much more can and should be done. **The Health Charities Coalition of Canada (HCCC) calls on the Government of Canada to take a leadership role in ensuring all people living in Canada have equitable and timely access to necessary prescription medications based on the best possible health outcomes rather than the ability to pay.**

¹ Health Council of Canada. (December 2011). "Fact Sheet: How Do Sicker Canadians with Chronic Disease Rate the Health Care System?" Retrieved from: www.healthcouncilcanada.ca/rpt_det.php?id=312

² Stuart B, Doshi JA, and Terza, JV. (2009). "Assessing the Impact of Drug Use on Hospital Costs" *Health Services Research*, 44(1):128-144.

³ Angus Reid Institute. (2015). Retrieved from: angusreid.org

⁴ Law, M. et al., (2012). "The effect of cost on adherence to prescription medications in Canada" *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (/cmaj.111270)

⁵ Law Commission of Ontario. (2012). "Vulnerable workers and Precarious Work." Retrieved from: www.lco-cdo.org/en/vulnerable-workers-final-report

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ CanCertainty Equal and Fair Treatment for All, (2016). Retrieved from: www.cancertaintyforall.ca

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. HCCC asks the Government of Canada to address access to medicines issues through the creation of an Advisory Panel and development of comprehensive, evidence-based pan-Canadian pharmacare standards.
 - HCCC believes the Government of Canada has a lead role to play in developing pan-Canadian pharmacare standards to address gaps in the healthcare system by providing Canadians with access to a broad range of evidence-based therapies through both private and public payers.
 - Implementation of comprehensive pan-Canadian standards would ensure all Canadians have access to prescription drug coverage. Treatment decisions would be made on the best-evidence available, between an individual and their healthcare provider, and respect an individual's choice based on need, not cost.
 - Stakeholders would include, but not be limited to, Canadians affected by a range of diseases and conditions, health charities, health care professionals, hospital administrators, economists, employers, private and public payers, industry representatives, policy makers and researchers.
 - Through broad collaboration, the Advisory Panel would provide recommendations on pharmacare standards which would inform a federal, provincial, territorial agreement that will be sustainable, equitable, provide greater access and improve health care outcomes for Canadians.
2. HCCC recommends the Government of Canada take a leadership role and share the cost of implementing comprehensive, evidence-based, pan-Canadian pharmacare standards to ensure Canadians have equitable access to prescription therapies regardless of geography, settings, or disease state.
 - HCCC recommends the Government of Canada ensure accountability for increased investment in pharmacare by specifying requirements that must be met in order for provinces and territories to receive increased transfer payments to implement comprehensive, evidence-based, pan-Canadian pharmacare standards.
3. HCCC recommends that health charities and the Canadians they represent be active participants in federal, provincial and territorial consultations to support the development of comprehensive, evidence-based, pan-Canadian pharmacare standards that meets the needs of Canadians.
 - Health charities represent the majority of Canadians affected by health issues and will provide valuable perspectives on the development of access to medicines policies and reform.
 - HCCC's membership is well-positioned to identify gaps in the pharmacare system that need to be addressed, describe concrete issues related to access and inequities, provide data on health outcomes and offer constructive and innovative solutions.
 - HCCC's members can act as a conduit for all levels of government to reach Canadians for their feedback on the development, implementation, on-going evaluation and continual improvement of access to medicines policies and reform measures.

HEALTH CHARITIES COALITION OF CANADA'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON ACCESS TO MEDICINES

Patient Partnerships:

Comprehensive, evidence-based, pan-Canadian pharmacare standards are developed and monitored in partnership with patients to ensure the right medicine gets to the right patient at the right time in a cost effective manner.

Quality:

Canadians deserve high-quality therapies and services that are appropriate for patient needs, respect an individual's choice and are delivered in a manner that is timely, safe, and effective, according to the most current scientific knowledge available.

Equitable:

All Canadians should have equitable access to a comprehensive range of evidence-based medications to help meet their health needs, regardless of who they are, the setting they are in, or where they live.

Sustainability:

The implementation of comprehensive, evidence-based, pan-Canadian pharmacare standards must be adequately resourced, cost effective for individuals and a sustainable element of the healthcare system that is continuously reviewed, evaluated and improved.