



Tuesday, April 7, 2020

The Honourable Christine Elliott, MPP, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health  
Ministry of Health  
5th Floor  
777 Bay Street  
Toronto, ON  
M7A 2J3

**Subject: Request for Immediate Policy Action and Flexibility for Cancer Patients during COVID-19**

Dear Minister,

On behalf of cancer patient groups, oncologists, and health policy advisors who are concerned about eliminating barriers to accessing treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic, we are writing to you to recommend some immediate financial relief and flexibility for cancer patients in Ontario.

**1. Patients need immediate, short-term relief of Trillium deductibles for catastrophic drug expenses.**

- Currently, in the Trillium Drug Program, cancer patients (under age 65) facing catastrophic drug costs for Take Home Cancer Treatments (THCTs) must first pay a quarterly deductible before they can receive medications from the pharmacy. In the current emergency, we recommend that ***any deductibles be deferred for six months to ensure no patient faces delay or goes without treatment*** – or needs to choose between essentials like food and rent and their cancer treatment. As you are aware, these up-front deductibles are calculated as approximately 4% of the household's prior year's income.
- THCTs are aligned to Cancer Care Ontario's mandate of keeping patients out of the hospital whenever clinically safe.
- While we are focusing on the needs of Ontario's cancer patients, this financial relief is required by every Ontario household facing catastrophic drug costs at this time and we would recommend your Ministry adopts the change broadly.

**2. Cancer patients need assurance that cancer treatment algorithms will be flexible (in the short- and medium-term) when their treatment pathways are changed due to COVID-19 safety measures.**

- Oncologists are needing to change treatment regimens to ensure patient safety and keep as many people out of hospitals and cancer centres. For example, some cancer patients are being prescribed Take-Home Cancer Treatments (THCTs) to avoid the risks of infusion centres and to reduce the chance

of hospitalization due to immune-related side effects of immunotherapies. Other patients are being asked to change treatment schedules, dosing, or to take breaks in therapy.

- While these decisions are being made to mitigate COVID-related risks, patients' treatment sequencing must be flexible to ensure they receive the best possible treatment in the future. For example, an immunotherapy option that would normally be reimbursed in the first line only should be available in the second line for those patients whose treatment plans are adjusted due to COVID-19 precautions. This flexibility must be adopted by both CCO and the Ontario Public Drug Plan's Exceptional Access Program (EAP) for Take-Home Cancer Treatments.

**3. Patients need support transitioning to public drug programs as they lose employer benefits.**

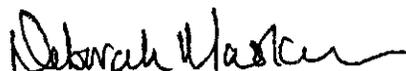
- Given the unprecedented number of households who have lost their employment benefits including drug coverage, we anticipate the need for communication in public briefings and to streamline and expedite enrolment processes for new applicants to the Trillium Drug Plan.
- As you are aware, Ontario's coverage for Take-Home Cancer Treatments has relied heavily on private insurance as the first payor. Cancer patients will need support to quickly transition to public payer programs to ensure cancer treatment that has been covered in the past by private insurance is not interrupted or delayed. Particularly for life-threatening diseases such as cancer, patients will need help bridging coverage and maintaining therapy as prescribed.

**4. Currently enrolled patients in Ontario's public drug programs need drug funding renewal processes to be streamlined.**

- Five of Canada's major private insurers have streamlined their processes for specialty drugs that previously required prior or special authorization to renew coverage for medications, eliminating the need for physician signatures on renewals, lab work, and appointments. For these private insurers, expiration/renewal dates have been postponed by some months to ensure continuity of coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar measures must be made to public programs including the Exceptional Access Program (EAP) and Trillium Drug Plans in Ontario.

Thank you for your attention to the issues and recommendations addressed in this letter. We look forward to hearing back from your office on appropriate steps to be taken in the short term to maintain high-quality and evidence-based cancer care in these coming months. On behalf of all of our member organizations, we applaud your government's commitment to the health, safety and well-being of the people of Ontario.

Sincerely,



Robert Bick and Deb Maskens  
Co-founders, CanCertainty Coalition

cc:

- Scott Guvara, Director, Provincial Drug Reimbursement Programs, Cancer Care Ontario
- David Schachow, Director, Drug Programs Delivery Branch at Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
- Angie Wong, Director, Ontario Public Drug Programs, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
- Dr. Bruce Colwell, President, Canadian Association of Medical Oncologists

### **About the CanCertainty Coalition**

The CanCertainty Coalition is the united voice of 30+ Canadian patient groups, cancer health charities, and caregiver organizations from across the country, joining together with oncologists and cancer care professionals to significantly improve the affordability and accessibility of take-home cancer treatments. For more information, visit [www.CanCertainty.com](http://www.CanCertainty.com).

### **CanCertainty Coalition Members**

- Aplastic Anemia and Myelodysplasia Association of Canada
- Best Medicines Coalition
- Bladder Cancer Canada
- Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada
- Canadian Breast Cancer Network
- Canadian Cancer Action Network
- Canadian Liver Foundation
- Canadian Skin Cancer Foundation
- Canadian Skin Patient Alliance
- Cancer Advocacy Coalition of Canada
- Cancer Fight Club
- Carcinoid Neuroendocrine Tumour Society of Canada
- Chronic Myelogenous Leukemia Society of Canada
- CLL Patient Advocacy Group
- Colorectal Cancer Canada
- Gastrointestinal Society
- GIST Sarcoma Life Raft Group Canada
- Hope and Cope
- Kidney Cancer Canada
- Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Canada
- Lung Cancer Canada
- Lymphoma Canada
- Melanoma Network of Canada
- Myeloma Canada
- Ovarian Cancer Canada
- Pancreatic Cancer Canada
- Rethink Breast Cancer
- Save Your Skin
- Testicular Cancer Canada
- The Canadian CML Network
- Thyroid Cancer Canada
- Young Adult Cancer Canada

### **Supporting Organizations**

- Anal Cancer Support Group
- Canadian Breast Cancer Support Fund
- Canadian Cancer Survivor Network
- Glad of Hope
- Life Saving Therapies Network