



CANADIAN DOCTORS FOR MEDICARE POLICY PRIMER

PHARMACARE

Why pharmacare is important

Canada is the only high-income country in the world with a universal health care system that does not include a universal drug plan. This glaring gap in our public health care system is bad for our health and our economy.

Canadians urgently need improved access to prescription drugs



In 2016, 730,000 people skimped on food and another 238,000 spent less on heating their home in order to pay for their prescriptions¹

According to a 2020 poll, **23% of Canadians decided not to fill or renew a prescription**, or took measures to extend their supply because they could not afford to keep taking the recommended dosage.²
That's more than 8.5 million Canadians.

1 in 5 (7.5 million) Canadians either don't have prescription drug insurance or have inadequate insurance to cover their medication needs.³

Pre-pandemic, **2 out of 3 Canadians** who had drug coverage in 2019 worried about losing it if they switched jobs, moved, or became unemployed.⁴

During the economic turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadians were twice as likely to have lost prescription drug coverage (14%) than to have gained it (7%).⁵



Universal pharmacare is good for our health and good for the economy

- Between 5.5 and 6.5% of hospitalizations in Canada can be attributed to the effects of non-adherence to prescribed medications (often related to patients not being able to afford their medications), costing our health care system as much as \$1.6 billion per year⁶.
- By implementing an information system and universal prescription coverage, a pharmacare program can reduce medicine underuse, overuse, and misuse by 50%⁷.
- Canadians pay the second-highest drug prices in the world, after the United States.⁸
- Universal publicly-funded drug coverage could reduce the total spending on prescription drugs in Canada by \$7.3 billion, through reducing administrative cost and increasing bulk purchasing of medicines⁹.

It should come as no surprise that **nearly nine-in-ten Canadians support a national pharmacare program (86%)**¹⁰.

www.canadiandoctorsformedicare.ca/resources

Policy Primer - Pharmacare

Commissions, reports, and costing exercises have all concluded that universal pharmacare is both good health policy and good economic policy.

2017

Parliamentary Budget Officer released a [report](#) estimating that a universal program for prescription medications would amount to about \$4.2 billion in savings in Canada ([some research](#) suggests the savings are even higher).

2018

Federal Standing Committee on Health released their report entitled "[Pharmacare Now: Prescription Medicine Coverage for All Canadians](#)"

Federal government announced the creation of the Advisory Committee on the Implementation of National Pharmacare.

2019

Advisory Committee on the Implementation of National Pharmacare released its [report](#) recommending: "the federal government work in partnership with provincial and territorial governments to establish a universal, single-payer public system of prescription drug coverage in Canada to ensure everyone has access to the drugs they need to maintain their physical and mental health. The Council also recommends the establishment of a Canadian drug agency, which would be responsible for developing a national list of prescription drugs (the formulary) beginning with an initial formulary of common or so-called essential medicines by January 1, 2022."

2020

The NDP tabled their [Canada Pharmacare Act](#)

2021

The Canada Pharmacare Act was overwhelmingly defeated by a vote of 295-32, with only two Liberal MPs voting for the proposed legislation. The 2021 Federal Budget included a commitment to implementing universal pharmacare, but offered no funding for prescription drug coverage and took no steps towards implementation.

What's next?

Health care advocates must continue to push provincial and federal elected representatives to move forward on implementation. Check out the organizations listed below to learn more ways to get involved.

Resources

[Canadian Doctors for Medicare](#)

[Heart and Stroke Foundation - Why Canada needs pharmacare](#)

[Canadian Health Coalition](#)

[Canadian Labour Congress](#)

[Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions](#)

[Pharmacare 2020](#)