

For Immediate Release, April 19, 2018

The National Pensioners Federation, representing 250 seniors' organizations across Canada completely supports the report "*Pharmacare Now: Prescription Medicine Coverage for all Canadians*" and all 18 recommendations of the Standing Committee on Health which was released on April 18, 2018. Indeed, we have long advocated for a single-payer public prescription drug coverage program – a universal pharmacare program.

We want to commend the members of the Standing Committee from all parties on their commitment in the two years that they have been holding hearings and examining the issue to ensuring a thorough process that gave primacy to the public interest.

This issue is indeed of critical importance to all Canadians but it is particularly critical to seniors; many of whom have very low incomes and cannot afford to buy the prescription drugs they need to support a reasonable quality of life or even survive in their later years. As the report notes, one in ten of all Canadians cannot afford to buy the medications they are prescribed by their doctors. More are likely to be seniors.

We now have renewed hope that equitable access to health care, based on need and not ability to pay, which is the cornerstone of Canadian Medicare, will become a reality. There are many variations in drug coverage across Canada and we are far behind most other OECD countries in recognizing that medical treatment has advanced since our Medicare system was first introduced 60 years ago when it responded to the needs of a much younger population than today and covered only hospital care and doctor care. Today much of medical treatment is done at home with prescription drugs.

We are also enriching big drug companies, spending more than 27 out of 29 countries in the OECD on prescription drugs. So we are encouraged that over the longer term, as a 2017 report by the Parliamentary Budget officer recently estimated, there will be \$41.2 billion dollars of savings to the public purse with a universal pharmacare program in place.

We have two recommendations for our federal government: Ensure that Eric Hoskins, who, we understand, was recently appointed by Prime Minister Trudeau to study how a universal pharmacare program could be implemented, is provided with all the financial and personnel support necessary to complete the task as soon as possible. We also want the Canada Health Act to be amended to include prescription drugs dispensed out of hospital. Different Canadian governments have been pondering the matter since the 1990s. We have waited far too long for a universal pharmacare program.

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