

## National Pharmacare Strategy

### **All Canadians should be able to access needed medications regardless of age, income and postal code**

Prescription drugs are a necessary part of medical treatment to cure or treat illness, and to prevent deterioration, even death, but at present, they are an insurmountable financial burden for many Canadians. Yet Canada is the only developed country with a universal healthcare system that does not include universal coverage for prescription drugs.

The majority of seniors are using multiple drugs: 64% of seniors on public drug programs are using five or more drugs, and this increases with age: 29% of those age 85 or older were using 10 or more drugs.<sup>1</sup>

Even with public drug coverage for seniors and depending on the province of residence, the co-payments can reach thousands of dollars and not all necessary medications are covered. These costs have led to people skipping their medications or spreading them out. Studies have found that one in 10 Canadians are not taking their medications as prescribed due to costs<sup>2</sup>.

In 2010, Canada's provincial health ministers responded by establishing the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance (pCPA) to bulk purchase/regulate a growing but limited list of generic and brand names drugs. The pCPA got a boost when the federal government announced it would join the Alliance in 2016. To date, the pCPA has reported annual savings of \$490 million<sup>3</sup>. However, Canadians spent \$28.8 billion on prescription drugs in 2014<sup>4</sup>. Public plans covered \$12.1 billion, private health plans paid out \$10.3 billion and Canadian households paid \$6.4 billion out of pocket<sup>5</sup>.

There are numerous studies identifying the need for system-wide innovation that will substantially reduce costs for individuals, increase fairness and improve the sustainability of the public and private drug coverage systems. An ultimate goal may be universal first dollar public coverage but significant savings, efficiencies and improved fairness can be achieved in the meantime to immediately help Canadians pay for their needed medications.

The National Pensioners Federation is calling on the federal government to work with the provincial and territorial governments to establish a national pharmacare plan to ensure that needed prescription drugs are accessible and affordable to all Canadians regardless of age, income and postal code by establishing:

1. a national formulary for publicly covered medications
2. a single drug review mechanism to decide on coverage
3. a single price for all medications whether paid publicly or privately

---

<sup>1</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information "Drug Use Among Seniors on Public Programs: 2002-2008," <https://secure.cihi.ca/estore/productFamily.htm?pf=PFC1404&locale=en&lang=EN&mediatype=0> .

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cmaj.ca/content/early/2012/01/16/cmaj.111270>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/drug-plan-costs-1.3410832>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cihi.ca/en/types-of-care/pharmaceutical-care-and-utilization/canadians-spent-288-billion-on-prescription-drugs>

<sup>5</sup> <https://secure.cihi.ca/estore/productFamily.htm?pf=PFC2499&lang=en&media=0>