



Canadian Health Coalition
Coalition canadienne de la santé

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MEDIA RELEASE
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Health Coalition calls upon feds to show leadership on public drug plan

'Affordability' no longer an excuse for inaction

(Ottawa, ON) In a tough open letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Canadian Health Coalition (CHC) is urging the federal government to stop stalling and start working with provincial and territorial governments to bring in a universal public Pharmacare program.

The letter was sent earlier today, on the heels of the release of a groundbreaking report that lays out the formula for a Pharmacare program that not only offers coverage to all Canadians but could save up to \$10.7 billion. The report, entitled *The Economic Case for Universal Pharmacare*, was authored by Professor Marc-Andre Gagnon and commissioned by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Institut de recherche et d'informations socio-économiques.

A letter was also sent to Canada's provincial health ministers who were attending a First Minister's meeting on health care, urging them to study the report and work in concert to bring the federal government back to the table to implement the plan.

In the letter, the CHC calls on the Prime Minister to direct his Minister of Health to return to the table with her provincial and territorial counterparts and fulfill the written commitment of Canada's First Ministers to secure fair and reasonable access to safe and affordable prescription drugs for all Canadians. In the past, the Minister has refused to acknowledge the National Pharmaceutical Strategy, testifying before the Standing Committee on Health (February 19, 2009), that the Strategy, agreed to in the 2004 First Ministers Accord, did not exist.

"We are urging the Prime Minister to read this important report, stop washing his hands of this issue by passing the drug bill to the provinces and show some real leadership by acknowledging the essential role of the federal government in establishing a fair and effective drug insurance plan for all Canadians," said Michael McBane, national coordinator of the Canadian Health Coalition (CHC).

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The report has garnered the endorsement of a number of eminent doctors, economists and researchers. “The way we pay for prescription drugs is broken,” stated Joel Lexchin, MD, professor, School of Health Policy and Management, York University. “Politicians hide behind the excuse that universal public coverage is too expensive. This study exposes that excuse as a fallacy. We can save money and cover everyone in the country. Medicare works and Pharmacare is no different.”

Dr. Robert Evans, O.C., Ph.D. (Economics, Harvard), whose internationally respected work includes groundbreaking comparative studies of various health care systems and funding strategies, endorsed the report. “Canada has an American-style system of paying for drugs, and it yields American results – inequity, waste and high costs. Marc-Andre Gagnon provides a comprehensive analysis of the major benefits to Canadians from a true Pharmacare system of universal, first-dollar public coverage. To date, however, private insurers, Big Pharma, anti-tax ideologues and apathetic governments have kept this beyond our reach,” Dr. Evans said.

According to the report, a national Pharmacare plan will enable all Canadians to enjoy equitable access to medicines, while controlling the growth of drug costs, a plan, according to the CHC, whose time has not only come but is long overdue. “Canadians have waited long enough and expect the federal government to work with its provincial and territorial partners and provide the leadership required to establish a fair and effective drug insurance program,” noted Kathleen Connors, Chairperson of the CHC, in the letter. “It is no longer credible for politicians to say we cannot afford universal public Pharmacare. The reality is Canadians cannot afford not to have Pharmacare.”

A copy of this report has been hand-delivered this morning to each of the country's health ministers meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland.

To access the report go to: www.pharmacarenow.ca

The Canadian Health Coalition is a not-for-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to protecting and expanding Canada's public health system for the benefit of all Canadians. It includes organizations representing seniors, women, churches, nurses, health care workers and anti-poverty activists from across Canada.

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