

Alternative Mandate Letter on Health Care

Send this letter and call on the Minister of Health to implement pharmacare within the next four years, and to ask the Minister to address the pressing need for mental health care, vision care, hearing and dental.

November 19, 2019

TO: The Honourable Patricia A. Hajdu, Minister of Health
CC: Prime Minister Trudeau and your Member of Parliament

To the Honourable Patricia A. Hajdu, Minister of Health,

Congratulations on your appointment to cabinet during the 43rd government of Canada.

While no party received a majority of seats in the last election, Canadians from coast-to-coast-to-coast overwhelmingly voted for parties that promised action on pharmacare, the climate crisis, electoral reform, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

The Council of Canadians is a grassroots-based social action organization that exists to advocate for clean water, fair trade, climate justice, public health care, and a vibrant democracy. In this minority parliament, the government will need to listen to Canadians and work to implement our priorities. Our supporters have tasked us with holding the government accountable and pushing for change on issues that matter to them. We issue you this mandate letter on behalf of our supporters.

It has long been the Council of Canadians' position that the federal government must commit to complete, accessible health care for all. Canada is the only country with a public health care plan not to include prescription drug coverage.

Drug prices are skyrocketing for Canadians and one in 10 patients cannot afford to take their prescribed medication. Across the country, close to 1 million people have to choose between getting the medications they need and paying for their rent or for food. A universal, publicly funded, comprehensive drug coverage program would provide all Canadians with access to the prescription medicines they need.

Universal pharmacare will result in better health outcomes for everyone who requires medication. Pharmacare will greatly reduce the burden on the health care system and governments will find savings as fewer people will need to make trips to emergency rooms because they can't afford their medications. A universal pharmacare plan would also take the pressure off employee benefits plans and would reduce how much employers have to pay into these plans.

The government must also ensure that trade agreements are created with people in mind. Health care and pharmaceutical policies must be protected and inflated drug prices in Canada stopped. This means entering into trade agreements that won't be binding indefinitely, or for decades into the future, and preventing inflated drug prices caused by overly-stringent intellectual property clauses.

The climate crisis has already become a public health issue, impacting both the physical and mental health of Canadians. The climate emergency continues to put additional stress on our fragile public

health care system. Air pollution from unrelenting forest fires in the west has resulted in Canadians staying indoors to avoid harmful health impacts from smoke pollution, and has led to increased doctor's visits and hospitalization. Fires and floods have forced people from their homes, causing enormous stress, anxiety and displacement-related health impacts. The climate crisis also increases the risk and prevalence of foodborne illnesses and vector-carried illnesses like Lyme disease. Addressing the climate emergency is critical for the long-term health of global ecosystems and the mental and physical health of Canadians.

The federal government has a critical role to play. In order to reflect the wishes of Canadians, ministers responsible for health care must:

- Commit to implementing an accessible, comprehensive public universal pharmacare program across the country within the next four years. Universal pharmacare must include a broad availability of medications to ensure everyone has their needs met.
- Provide full, accessible public dental, vision, and hearing care to ensure health needs are met without exception.
- Increase the availability of publicly-accessible mental health care, including substance use disorder treatment. Not only is this ethically sound, it will reduce wait times and conserve resources in emergency rooms and walk-in clinics, and ultimately reduce strain on the health care system as a whole.
- Prioritize the intersection of public health care and migrant justice, which Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care is addressing in their work. Health care is a human right. All people should have access to health care without fear of detention, discrimination or deportation, regardless of immigration status. The Canadian government should return to covering health care for everyone living in the country, regardless of their immigration status.
- Provide comprehensive insulin and supplies coverage for diabetics. Insulin is a life-saving measure. It is unethical that diabetics living in Canada have to pay out-of-pocket for aspects of diabetic-specific treatment.
- Recognize climate change as a health risk. Commit to a Green New Deal for public health care.
- Reduce wait times for non-life-saving surgeries so that people are not forced to endure long wait times for necessary operations.
- Commit to the social determinants of health being fundamental to decision-making for present and future health care policy.
- Commit to more comprehensive, culturally-safe access to gender affirming care across Canada.

In this minority government, Canadians make up the balance of power. The Council of Canadians is committed to protecting our health care system from degradation and privatization. The Canadian government has a responsibility to ensure that public tax dollars are properly serving the public. You are accountable for ensuring that the health care needs of all the people living within our three coasts are met. As the Minister of Health, you have been entrusted with tremendous responsibility. We hope we can count on you to deliver this important mandate.

I await your response.