

# Pharmacare is a Prescription for Better Medicine

Canadians know that a universal, national drug coverage plan – also known as pharmacare – is long overdue. Canada has the unique distinction of being the only country with a universal, national public health care plan not to include prescription drug coverage. The fact that health policy experts at all levels of government, labour groups, the business community, health care advocates, and the public continue to put forward the idea of universal pharmacare shows there is strong passion for better and more equitable medicine in Canada.

No other policy change and program can have the same kind of positive impact on the well-being of Canadians, while saving as much as \$14 billion or more annually, than universal pharmacare. The evidence shows that our current system is untenable in the long term since it cannot control rising drug costs.

With your help, and with the generous assistance of our partners in Labour, the Council of Canadians is launching a new educational Pharmacare Toolkit that gives people the information and tools they need to speak to their MPs, employers, neighbours and friends about the importance and urgent need for pharmacare.

Canada needs pharmacare because:

- Prescription drug costs are skyrocketing. Total spending on prescription drugs has nearly quadrupled since the 1990s, of which 42 per cent is financed by the public sector and 23 per cent is paid out-of-pocket by patients. In 2016, Canadians filled more than 600 million prescriptions at a cost of more than \$30 billion.



- Employers are struggling to contain costs on benefits programs for employees. Benefits remain among the top issues in 2017 for both employers and Labour. Reports indicate Canadian companies spend about \$200 million per week on prescription drugs in costs incurred by employer drug plans. In 2017, projections show that the medical costs for group benefits plans will increase by eight per cent due largely to increasing drug costs and Canada's aging population.

According to the Canadian Labour Congress, in 2013, 73 per cent of full-time employees had health benefits coverage by their employer, compared to only 27 per cent for part-time workers. Canadians working low-income jobs are the most vulnerable in our system as they generally do not have drug coverage as part of their employment, but they earn “too much” to be covered under public plans.

For workers aged 25 and under only 25 per cent have employer-provided benefits. This comes at a time when approximately 39 per cent of workers between the ages of 15 and

29 are precariously employed. The Ontario government has recently taken steps to address this issue by launching a new program that will provide coverage for prescribed medications for youth 25 and younger.

With rising drug costs and only a limited number of people having drug plan coverage in Canada, it is not surprising that studies show that one in three Canadians with incomes under \$50,000 reported that they or someone in their house were not able to take their medication as prescribed – if at all – because of costs.

The solution to these runaway costs is clear – by adopting a universal pharmacare system, which has the tools and buying power to attain reasonable costs for the medications Canadians need, we create a system that benefits everyone.

You can be a part of the solution! Visit the Council of Canadians website at [canadians.org/pharmacare](http://canadians.org/pharmacare) or call us at toll-free at 1-800-387-7177 to obtain your own Pharmacare Toolkit and take action in your community. Your generous donations also make it possible for us to get these toolkits into the hands of people across the country.

**Web:** [canadians.org/pharmacare](http://canadians.org/pharmacare)

**Report:** *A Prescription for Better Medicine: How universal pharmacare would give Canada an economic advantage*  
[canadians.org/bettermedicine](http://canadians.org/bettermedicine)

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