

Canvassing How-To – A Guide to Building Power for Pharmacare

1. Campaign for Pharmacare

We have never needed pharmacare more urgently than we do now.

Inflation is eating away at our pocketbooks, forcing millions of us to choose between paying the rent, buying groceries, or filling our prescriptions. A staggering 3.4 million Canadians (that's 11 per cent!) can't afford their medications, while some 7.5 million – nearly a quarter of the adult population – are un- or under-insured.

It's time to fight for pharmacare.

With the March 2022 confidence and supply agreement with the NDP, Justin Trudeau's Liberal government committed to passing a Canada Pharmacare Act by the end of 2023. We need to make sure this promise is fulfilled. But Big Pharma and its insurance industry allies are working to torpedo the whole project.

This is a fight we can win, if we organize.

We have a clear plan for the public, universal pharmacare we want. We have a minority government vulnerable to popular pressure. We have a huge majority of support – 9 in 10 people in Canada say they want pharmacare. Our opponents – Big Pharma and the insurance industry – are powerful, but they also are widely reviled and untrusted. And thanks to the confidence and supply agreement, pharmacare is on the political agenda in 2023.

We need to raise the political temperature on our Members of Parliament – especially Liberal MPs – to make pharmacare happen. They need to hear how important this issue is to their constituents, and they need to feel that there will be significant electoral consequences if they fail to follow through.

By uniting in cities and towns across Canada to demand pharmacare now, we can win an historic expansion of our cherished public health care system. Help make pharmacare a reality by building support for this winning policy in your community and put pressure on your MPs.

2. What is canvassing? Why do it?

If facts alone were sufficient to win necessary reforms, we would have had pharmacare long ago. There have been numerous government committees and expert reports demonstrating that a public, single-payer drug insurance plan will ensure everyone has access to medically-necessary medications

while saving billions through lower drug costs, administrative efficiencies, and avoided hospitalizations.

But against powerful vested interests like Big Pharma, facts aren't enough. Facts and arguments need to be backed up by mobilized, informed, and energized groups of people calling for change in cities and towns across the country.

The Council of Canadians just wrapped up 16 pharmacare town halls across the country where we heard stories of people struggling to afford medications, explored the case for public, universal pharmacare, and discussed the critical opportunity we have to make this winning policy a reality. Countless people came out to these events, learned more, and stepped up to organize for pharmacare, many of them for the first time because this issue speaks to the reality of their lives. Now, it's time to bring those discussions to every neighbourhood, street corners, pharmacy, or kitchen table, and build public support for pharmacare.

Canvassing is the work of reaching out and speaking one-on-one with people about an issue you care about and motivating them to take action. We can build the people power needed to win pharmacare, one conversation at a time, by speaking with our neighbours about the urgent need for pharmacare and the opportunity before us, and inviting them to join the fight.

3. Step-by-step guide to canvassing for pharmacare

We are inviting you to build local power in your community to make pharmacare happen through direct outreach. We need to speak to people, no matter where they are on the political spectrum.

If you have been part of a previous political campaign, you might be familiar with canvassing. Depending on your community, canvassing can take different forms. We have had great success canvassing outside pharmacies, on busy street corners, and at public demonstrations for other relevant political issues. Door to door canvassing also works if you believe the issue is likely to resonate with the community. Feel free to experiment with different ways of reaching people and let us know how it goes.

a. Plan a canvass

Through the network of Council of Canadians chapters and local organizers who put together town halls, there are likely people in your community ready to organize for pharmacare. If local organizers or chapter have not reached out to you, your Regional Organizers can help you connect with others in your community. Work with others in the community to host a canvass or join an existing one. We have found that having a buddy helps keep us accountable, make canvassing more fun, and build community.

It is helpful to identify a canvass lead who will pick a time and place, coordinate to have materials available, and communicate with everyone. Once you've made a plan, invite people from the local

organizing group, chapter, or those in your network, to join. Before your canvass, exchange contact information with everyone who's planning to join, ideally by phone, and communicate if something comes up. Send a reminder text on the day of.

At the beginning of the canvass, get to know everyone who has joined and their comfort level with canvassing. If needed, do a role play on the spot to get warmed up. Distribute materials, and pair up newer folks with those more experienced. Identify a time and place for meeting up afterwards.

b. Materials needed

For this campaign, the canvassing goal is to tell people about pharmacare, the opportunity to win it, and to invite people to sign a petition and join the campaign. Before you head out, make sure you have the following:

- Pharmacare petition – Printable on regular letter-sized paper, this is where people put down their information when they express interest in the issue/campaign. Ask people to print legibly, and don't hesitate to ask them to clarify if the handwriting is unclear.
- Pharmacare flyer/handbill – This is an 8.5 x 5.5 double-sided handout with key information about the campaign and a QR code to sign an online petition. Hand out this handout to invite people to find out more. You can find a printable version of the flyer here, get them from local organizers/chapter, or request them from your Regional Organizer.
- Clipboard and pens – To make signing petitions easier.
- Anything else to keep you comfortable while outside and in conversations with people (water, snacks, sunscreen, etc).
- Factsheet – Have one handy for each canvasser to prepare themselves.

c. Canvassing script

Get yourself familiar with the canvassing script before the canvass, and adapt it to fit your personal experience, local reality, and comfort level. We have recommended an outline of a script below.

- Opening line options:
 - “Hey, have you heard about pharmacare? It's a program to include prescription medication in the public health care system so you don't have to pay at the pharmacy.”
 - “I'm out here with others in support of public pharmacare. Have you heard about it?”
 - “Do you know about pharmacare, a program that would mean the government would cover all prescription medicine for you and your family?”
 - “Do you or someone you care about have trouble paying for your medication?”
 - “Would you be interested in helping to pressure the government to keep its promise on pharmacare?”
- Listen actively.
- Explain that we have an opportunity:

- The Liberals and the NDP have promised to deliver pharmacare this year
- We know they're being lobbied heavily by the pharmaceutical and insurance industries to back down.
- I'm with the Council of Canadians and we're organizing people here in (place) and across the country to push back against that big pharma influence and get pharmacare across the finish line.
- Ask: We have a petition calling on our MP and the minister to make pharmacare happen – will you sign it?
 - If you need more information, I have a flyer here with more information about the campaign.
 - We are bringing the petition to meetings with MP to show them that we need pharmacare, and we need it now.
 - The Council of Canadians will follow up with you about more updates on the campaign.
- If they are very engaged: Invite them to be part of the campaign.
 - Here in CITY/TOWN we are doing more canvasses like this and meeting with our MP to tell them we need pharmacare now. Would you like to join us?
- Thank them for their time.

d. Debrief

After your canvass, make time to debrief as a group. As part of the debrief,

- Count up the signatures. It is a concrete way to measure progress, feel good about the work you've done, and build confidence.
- Discuss what works and what doesn't. Do you make any adjustments to the script that should be noted? Are there questions you don't know the answer to? How was the reception compared to previous canvasses in other locations?
- Follow up: Do you need to follow up individually with anyone? Who will keep the petition sheet? Who will type up the information and send a follow up email? Who will send a photo of the petition sheet to the Regional Organizer?
- Take a group photo.
- Next step: When is the next canvass?

4. Dos and don'ts

- Do smile
- Do speak clearly and invite people into a conversation.
- Do know when to end a conversation.
- Do ask people to clarify their handwriting on the petition sheet.
- Don't take it personally if someone is rude.
- Don't shout after people or follow them if they're not interested in talking

- Don't try to argue. We are finding our friends, not trying to change minds.

5. Resources

Council of Canadians staff is available to provide support, training, and troubleshooting along the way. Reach out to the campaigner, Nik Barry-Shaw, at nbarryshaw@canadians.org, or connect with the Regional Organizer for your region:

- Angela Giles in the Atlantic – agiles@canadians.org
- Vi Bui in Ontario/Quebec/Nunavut - vbui@canadians.org
- Wendy Lerat in the Prairies/Northwest Territories – wlerat@canadians.org
- David Ravensbergen in the Pacific/Yukon - dravensbergen@canadians.org

The following resources are also available:

- Factsheet: <https://canadiansorg.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/canadians.org/EbgnWV42qKJEtS6nrDL-IBEBYYdvU4te1Qclwnslo59FrQ?e=tlrwu7>
- Petition sheet: [pharmacare petition 2023 - Jun 2023.docx](#)
- Analyses on pharmacare:
 - <https://canadians.org/analysis/pharmacare-will-save-us-a-s-load/>
 - <https://canadians.org/analysis/utopian-idea-pharmacare/>