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Canada's Labour Leaders to the Premiers: Canadians Need Life-Saving Pharmacare Plan

Meeting in Alberta for events concurrent to the Council of the Federation, Labour Leaders from across Canada urge provincial and territorial Premiers to lobby the federal government for a national Pharmacare plan to ensure all Canadians have access to life-saving medications, and to bring down the costs of the current increasingly out-of-control system.

“Canada’s piece-meal multi-payer drug system is expensive, inefficient, and doesn’t ensure people receive the life-saving prescriptions they need,” said Patrick Colford, President of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour. “Canadians are spending millions of dollars a year on this patchwork of multi-payer funding, paying among the highest prices worldwide for prescription medications, squandering money hand over fist that’s desperately needed to cover other healthcare investments.” Canada’s public per capita prescription drug spending in 2014 was second highest amongst OECD countries, at \$772 USD per person, far above the OECD average.

The high costs of the current system are also felt by individuals and families. Evidence shows that Canadians, including Atlantic Canadians, who rely on prescription drugs simply don’t have the money to cover costs, and instead are splitting pills, skipping dosages to stretch prescriptions, sharing medicines, or going deep into debt to make ends meet. Even more concerning, almost one in ten Canadians are going without life-saving prescribed medicines because they can’t afford them, which can cause serious health complications. “When people skip their medications or otherwise ignore doctors’ orders because of costs, additional burdens to the healthcare system actually cost everyone more,” said Patrick Colford, President of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour.

By adopting a single-payer program, Canadians would benefit from bulk purchasing power, giving them the power to obtain competitively priced prescription drugs. Through aggressive pharmaceutical company competition for Canadian business, a single-payer universal prescription drug program could save Canadians approximately \$7.3 billion a year based on an additional \$1 billion in public sector spending.

“Canadians know bulk buying is the smart option,” said Patrick Colford, President of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour. “In public opinion surveys, over 90% of both citizens and employers believe a Universal Prescription Drug Plan is important to Canadian healthcare coverage. Pharmacare is the type of smart policy Canadians are looking for from our political leaders.”

Canada is the only country with universal health care that does not have a universal program for prescription coverage, despite the stated goal of universal coverage in the 2004-2014 Health Accord.

During events concurrent to the Council of the Federation, Presidents of provincial and territorial labour federations will urge premiers from provinces and territories across Canada to re-commit to a single-payer, universal prescription drug plan to save lives while saving Canadians money.

Together, Canada's provincial and territorial labour federations give voice to over three million workers, represented by the Alberta Federation of Labour, British Columbia Federation of Labour, Canadian Labour Congress, Manitoba Federation of Labour, New Brunswick Federation of Labour, Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, Northern Territories Federation of Labour, Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, Ontario Federation of Labour, Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour, Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and Yukon Federation of Labour.

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