



Pharmacare: The Unfinished Business of Canadian Medicare



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ABSTRACT

Canada has the unique distinction of being the only country with a universal national healthcare care plan not to include Pharmacare; the universal, public coverage of prescription drugs.

A literature review was conducted to investigate the benefits of implementing Pharmacare.

Historically, little progress has been made toward a universal drug plan. Pharmacare would ensure that all Canadians receive equitable access to safe, cost-effective, and appropriately prescribed medicines.

Additionally, a universal, publicly managed drug coverage ensures that prescriptions are contingent on contemporary medical evidence by integrating the management of medical and hospital care. Finally, Pharmacare would save billions of dollars, hence stimulating the federal and provincial economies and aiding Canadian businesses.

Pharmacare is the only suitable option as the current fragmented patchwork of public and private drug plans become increasingly unsustainable.

OBJECTIVES

- To explore the past and present state of Canadian pharmaceuticals
- To investigate the benefits of implementing Pharmacare, a universal, publicly managed drug plan that would operate in conjunction with Canada's public healthcare system

INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous calls to include prescription medication in Canada's universal public healthcare system since 1960s.

- **1964:** Royal Commission on Health Services recommended that Canada implement Pharmacare following the introduction of Medicare
- **1997:** National Forum on Health recommended a universal public drug benefit that would operate in conjunction with the healthcare system
- **2002:** The Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada recommended the integration of necessary prescription drugs within Medicare.
- **2018:** Ontario implemented OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare program, which makes 4400 drug products free for Ontarians age 24 years or younger



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. The per capita cost of prescription medications has increased **fivefold** since 1984.

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METHODS

A literature review was completed and sorted through the use of Mendeley. Primary and secondary journal articles, official reports, and news editorials were used to capture the objectivity and subjectivity of the topic. Several databases were used including: PubMed, Google Scholar, Web of Science, Medline (Ovid), and Scopus.

RESULTS

The current system formulates an environment where economic and social conditions dictate the level of pharmaceutical care one receives.

- 1 in 10 Canadians do not take their medicines as prescribed due to costs



Figure 1 More than two-thirds of Canadians, close to 25 million, do not have access to a public drug plan.

Figure 2 About 23 per cent of Canadian families – nearly 1 in 4 – fail to take needed medication due to costs.



RESULTS

Pharmacare would integrate pharmaceutical and healthcare management.

- Fewer than 1 in 3 doctors in Canada use electronic prescribing tools
- Nearly 1 in 6 Canadians are hospitalized due to inappropriate prescriptions
- 1 in 3 elderly Canadians receive prescriptions for drugs known to pose health risks to seniors

Pharmacare makes sense financially.

- Canada spends 50% more per capita on pharmaceuticals than residents of countries with Pharmacare such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, and New Zealand
- A \$1.2-billion expenditure from the government to provide Pharmacare for 117 essential medicines saves the public and private sector \$4.3-billion and \$8.2-billion respectively

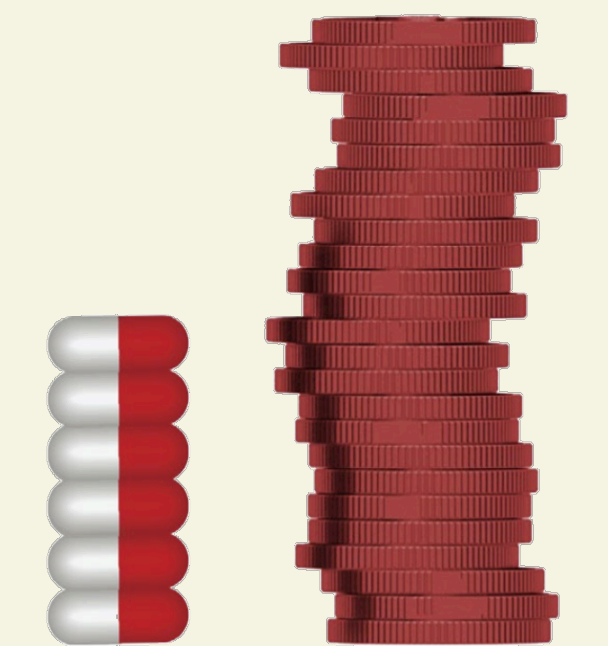


Figure 3 In 2016, Canadians filled over 600 million prescriptions at a cost of more than \$30 billion.

CONCLUSIONS

Today, growing numbers of individuals are calling for the expansion of public drug coverage in Canada. Pharmacare is achievable and financially sustainable. Every comparable universal health care system in the world proves that this is the case, because they all provide better access to medicines for less than Canada now pays.

The future seems hopeful as Dr. Eric Hoskins, the former Ontario Health Minister, chairs the newly created federal Pharmacare committee. It is recommended for Pharmacare to be fully implemented by 2020.



Figure 4 An astonishing 91 per cent of Canadians support a universal pharmacare plan. It is time for change.