



Canadian Health Coalition
Coalition canadienne de la santé

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Canadians Can't Afford *Not* to Have a Public Drug Plan

OTTAWA – The Canadian Health Coalition (CHC) has released a ground-breaking report entitled *Life Before Pharmacare*. Starting in the fall of 2007, the CHC held a series of public hearings in communities across Canada. Over 250 Canadians gave testimony on how prescription drug costs affect them and their loved ones. The hearings were the first time Canadians had an opportunity to share their experiences and insights regarding prescription drug costs, availability and effectiveness.

“The burden of a loved one being sick in front of you and going down with dementia is enough. Last year we were \$6000 in debt with drug bills. Now we are faced with losing our home. We both worked hard all our lives and I don't think that's right,” said one retiree in Sarnia, Ontario.

Many Canadians have no drug coverage at all, and those who do are facing exorbitant and ever-increasing costs. “Too many Canadians are falling through the cracks. Now is the time for coordinated government action on a universal public drug plan,” said Kathleen Connors, CHC Chairperson. “In this serious economic downturn, Canadians are losing their drug plans as they lose their jobs. A public Pharmacare plan will not only provide medically-necessary drugs to all Canadians, regardless of where they live or work, it will also create more efficient spending in the health care system. We'll get more and pay less,” added Connors.

Canada currently has a patchwork of private and public plans so full of holes that comprehensive drug coverage is not a reality for most. The result is an inequity reminiscent of the days before Medicare where people who can afford to pay for medications get them, and those who can't, don't. The report concludes that a universal public drug plan, cost-shared by federal and provincial/territorial governments and employers, and administered by provinces and territories, would result in better quality care and reduced costs.

In the words of Philip Lillies who lives in Moncton with his wife who suffers from multiple sclerosis: “Efficiency is one of the strongest arguments for implementing a comprehensive, universal pharmacare program. For the hodge-podge of programs that attempt to substitute for it is not only unfair, they are also costly both in a financial sense and a social sense.”

Life Before Pharmacare is published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. To download the report or order a copy, visit their website: www.policyalternatives.ca

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