Canadian Pharmacists Association

Thank you for requesting NDP positions on questions of concern to pharmacists. We welcome the opportunity to present our views on these important issues affecting the health of all Canadians.

What commitments will your party make to improve health outcomes for Canadians and address the current challenges of the healthcare system?

New Democrats believe in an active federal leadership role in ensuring equitable quality health care is available to all Canadians. We are strongly committed to rejuvenating the relationship between the federal government, provinces and territories after a decade of neglect under the Harper Conservatives.

An NDP government will initiate discussions with the provinces and territories toward developing a new set of national health care agreements and will work collaboratively with provinces and territories to inject new energy into cooperative initiatives already underway.

In Election 2015, we are proposing a comprehensive package of targeted initiatives to address gaps in our system that are creating barriers to Canadians’ care.

These improvements include:

- providing $2.6 billion in new federal funding focused on universal public drug coverage, along with $80 million in dedicated funding to improve provincial-federal capacity for drug reviews, listing, joint pricing negotiations and improving safety by reducing inappropriate prescribing;
- investing $300 million to support clinic construction and a further $200 million to create recruitment grants to complement successful provincial programs helping to connect health professionals with Canadians who don’t have timely access to a family doctor, improving the focus on prevention, screening, chronic disease care and early detection so health concerns are caught earlier when they are more easily treated;
- devoting $1.8 billion over four years to help provinces improve seniors care, including stronger home care, more nursing home beds and better palliative end-of-life care, working closely with provinces and territories, respecting their role in health care delivery, to target these much-needed resources to areas each province identifies as a priority; and
- investing $1.3 billion to improve EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 45 weeks and $200 million annually to expand the definition of who may access compassionate care benefits to include non-terminal illnesses, increasing the number of Canadians who would qualify for compassionate care benefits.
What would your party do to address these gaps and ensure that all Canadians have access to pharmacist services and appropriate drug therapies no matter where they live or their income?

The NDP is committed to achieving better health outcomes for Canadians by raising the quality and lowering the cost of drug therapies. We will assume a federal leadership role in ensuring fair and equitable drug coverage across the country. While the provinces and territories, through the Pan-Canadian Pricing Alliance in Canada and the work of the Health Care Innovation Working Group, have already achieved considerable savings, the lack of a national formulary and federal leadership continues to undermine national coordination. The Harper Conservatives’ lack of leadership has, in effect, obstructed provincial and territorial efforts to cooperate in developing such a national plan. As a result, Canadians continue to pay more for prescription drugs than those in other OECD countries - with costs varying depending on where you live.

A New Democratic government will invest $2.6 billion in new federal funding to initiate universal public drug coverage, to be phased in over the next four years and reaching $1.5 billion annually in 2019/2020. This commitment does not depend on matching funds from the provinces and territories.

The NDP will work with provinces, pool our resources and leverage our combined strength so that together we can:

- Negotiate lower drug prices that are more in line with other developed countries;
- Bulk purchase prescription drugs at better prices; and
- Streamline the drug review and listing process, reducing duplication and overhead costs for the provincial and federal governments.

To support this partnership, we will dedicate a further $80 million over four years to improve provincial-federal capacity for drug reviews, listing, joint pricing negotiations and improving safety by reducing inappropriate prescribing.

New Democrats are committed to re-engaging with provinces and territories to create a new health accord and to working collaboratively to finally introduce a national plan, within our public health system, to lower Canadians’ costly output on drugs.

An NDP government will also invest ½ $billion in clinic construction and the recruitment of additional health professionals to improve Canadians’ access to primary care. Various innovative clinic models could be used, including community health clinics and mobile rural clinics. Recruitment grants, complementing successful provincial programs, will help to connect teams of health professionals with Canadians who don’t have timely access to primary care, improve the focus on prevention, screening, chronic disease care and early detection so health concerns are caught earlier when they are more easily treated. The growing inclusion of pharmacists in the comprehensive patient-centred professional team approach is to be encouraged.
Will your party commit to supporting the development of a national e-prescription plan?

As confirmed in the CMA and CPhA 2012 e-Prescribing Joint Statement, support for e-prescribing is widespread among health care professionals, even if its development and use remains inconsistent and a work-in-progress across the country. Reportedly 62 percent of Canadians’ drug dispensing profiles had been incorporated for use by authorized clinicians by the end of September last year.

New Democrats recognize the benefits for health outcomes to be gained from comprehensive e-prescribing within a fully-developed electronic health record system. We support the concept of a national e-prescribing plan and, as government, will examine ways to rally more practical support behind this important initiative. National leadership is needed to encourage and facilitate the harmonization of e-prescribing efforts in various provincial and territorial jurisdictions. Challenges remain in realizing this goal – several were identified in the Blueprint for Pharmacy, Implementation Plan – and we will work with the Canadian Pharmacists Association, Canada Health Infoway and others on strategies to address these challenges in a timely way.

What would your party do to improve child immunization rates in Canada?

A New Democratic government will base its health policy decisions on scientific evidence and this fundamental commitment applies to child vaccinations above all. Canada is not in good shape on this issue, ranking 28th of 29 industrial countries and well below the 95 percent needed for the benchmark herd immunity threshold. Ironically, we have world-class vaccine researchers working in a health delivery environment unable to ensure that the products of their science reach and protect their fellow Canadians.

This is not for lack of effort by Canada’s pharmacists, however. As Canada’s most publicly accessible health professionals, you have been active in both administrating vaccines and educating the public on their value. Delivery of health services in Canada – including child immunization – falls under the jurisdiction of provinces and territories. And, as with many other health services, there is considerable variation in that delivery depending on where you live.

To rectify this patchwork effect, leadership from the federal government is needed and, under a New Democratic government, it will be provided. An NDP government will bring together our provincial and territorial counterparts, along with health care providers, to collaborate on developing a pan-Canadian strategy to raise our immunization rate to a 95 percent target. This strategy could include elements such as bolstering public education, developing immunization surveillance across jurisdictions and maximizing the effectiveness of health care providers such as pharmacists. When it comes to protecting children from communicable diseases, a national response is required because we are dealing with a problem that affects us all.