

National citizens' panel recommends urgent action to expand public drug coverage for all Canadians

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Today, a special panel of citizens convened to make recommendations on the future of prescription drug coverage in Canada calls on the federal government to create a universal public insurance plan for necessary medicines.

At 8:45am, the Chair of the **Citizens' Reference Panel on Pharmacare in Canada** will testify to the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Health on the process that brought these Canadians together and on the contents of their final report: ***Necessary Medicines: Recommendations from the Citizens' Reference Panel on Pharmacare in Canada.***

"The panelists were surprised to learn that many Canadians do not have adequate drug coverage and that Canadians on average spend considerably more for medically-necessary drugs than most other countries with comparable health care systems," says Peter MacLeod, the Panel's chair. "They believe the government should act and create a national pharmacare system that is equitable and cost-effective."

About the panel

The Citizens' Reference Panel on Pharmacare in Canada is an innovative initiative to provide detailed advice and a clear citizen perspective to health ministers and policy makers.

This summer, 10,000 households were randomly selected by Canada Post to receive an invitation to volunteer. Participants were then randomly selected by Civic Lottery ensuring that the panel broadly matched Canada's demographics and the prevalence of prescription drug coverage.

Ultimately, thirty-five Canadians were randomly selected as representatives from each province and the territories. Together, they travelled to Ottawa to participate in a five-day dialogue, propose recommendations, reach consensus and draft their report.

During their meetings, the panelists learned about Canada's health care system and how prescription drugs are provided here and in other countries. They heard from 20 guest speakers, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, brand-name and generic manufacturers, insurers, retailers, patients, public agencies, academics, and former policy makers.

The process was overseen by a committee featuring leading clinicians, senior public servants and health researchers from across Canada.

The recommendations

The Citizens' Reference Panel on Pharmacare in Canada recommends immediate action to address flaws in the current patchwork of public and private drug coverage. They proposed a vision of prescription drug coverage they believed "Canadians could be proud of."

Their recommendations are grounded in core principles they felt represented their values as Canadians: **that coverage be universal, patient-centred, accountable to the public, evidence-based, and sustainable.**

The panel recommends universal public coverage of medicines listed on a new national formulary. They recommend that this formulary be extensive enough to accommodate the full range of individual patient needs, including rare diseases. They also recommend that all covered drugs would

undergo a rigorous evaluation process to ensure both the efficacy and value-for-money of funded treatments.

As a first step towards a comprehensive public drug plan, the panel also calls on the government to move immediately to implement public coverage for a short list of basic, frequently prescribed drugs. This short list would begin the shift towards a comprehensive universal pharmacare system and become the basis for a new national formulary.

The panel also endorses an ongoing role for private insurers in providing supplemental coverage. Under any new system, employers, unions and individuals could continue to purchase private insurance for medications not on the public formulary as well as other para-medical services.

The panel urges the government to fund the program through modest income and corporate tax increases, and urges further consideration of co-payment models provided they do not create an unreasonable barrier for low-income individuals.

"This is a timely and important contribution to a national dialogue on strengthening pharmaceutical coverage," says Dr. Steve Morgan, Professor of health policy at the University of British Columbia, and the panel's lead researcher.

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For more information and to download a copy of the report:

<http://www.crppc-gccamp.ca>

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