

Premiers Should Not Give Up On Pharmacare

Medical Reform Group

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The Medical Reform Group today sent a letter to each of the provincial premiers asking them not to give up on a national pharmacare plan. The physician group believes that a national drug plan is both vital and affordable.

“Under Medicare, Canadians have access to doctors and hospitals but not medications,” said Dr. Irfan Dhalla, a spokesperson for the MRG. “This makes no sense. Many drugs are medically necessary, and these should be covered in a similar manner to physician and hospital services.”

The MRG believes that the provincial and federal governments should share the cost of a pharmacare program. The feds should offer enough money to cover 50 per cent of the costs. As with Medicare, a province would have to agree to certain conditions to claim its share of the money. These conditions would be the same as those for Medicare:

1. **Comprehensiveness**—provinces would be required to make available all drugs on a national formulary deemed necessary for Canadians to access.
2. **Accessibility**—provinces would be required to provide first-dollar coverage (i.e., patients would not have to pay a deductible or co-payment), initially for the most essential drugs and eventually for all drugs on the formulary.
3. **Universality**—All residents of the province should be eligible for coverage under uniform terms and conditions.
4. **Portability**—For travelling residents, coverage would extend to other jurisdictions.
5. **Public administration.**

“These five principles work for Medicare and they will work for pharmacare too,” said Dr. Rosana Pellizzari, Medical Officer of Health for the Perth District Health Unit and also spokesperson for the MRG.

“Initially some provinces will be reluctant to join a national plan, but as with Medicare, eventually all will find the temptation of federal dollars

impossible to resist.”

“Ralph Klein was right when he said the idea of a national pharmacare plan was a ‘stroke of brilliance’,” concluded Dr. Dhalla. “We call on him, his fellow premiers and Prime Minister Paul Martin to use this week’s First Ministers’ Meeting to make this brilliant idea a reality.”

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