

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
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cc Honourable Jane Philpott, PC MP, Minister of Health

La version française suit.

17 November 2015

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

Congratulations on becoming Canada's 23rd prime minister.

Over the course of the election campaign and in the weeks following your victory, there have been many important discussions about Canadian identity and our core values. Among the values that Canadians most support in poll after poll are those embodied in our medicare system: particularly, a belief that all residents of Canada should have access to quality health care.

We are health professionals and health policy researchers concerned, as you are, with the state of Canada's universal health care system. Soon, your government will be engaging Canada's premiers and ministers of health in discussions about a new health accord. We hope universal pharmacare will be at the top of your agenda for those discussions.

Here's why.

Pharmaceuticals are so essential to health and well-being that the World Health Organization has declared that all nations should ensure universal access to necessary medicines. Consistent with that recommendation, every developed country with a universal health care system provides universal coverage of medically necessary prescriptions except Canada.

Unlike any comparable country, Canada's universal public health care system effectively ends as soon as a patient is handed a prescription to fill.

Millions of Canadians have no drug coverage at all and millions more have coverage that is inadequate to ensure access to medicines. As a result, almost one quarter of Canadians report they or members of their household have not taken medicines as prescribed because of costs.

It is well documented that financial barriers to necessary medicines result in worse health for patients. They also result in unnecessary increases in the use of hospital and medical care.

National standards for universal coverage of medically necessary prescription drugs would therefore satisfy a central goal of pharmaceutical policy: ensuring all Canadians have equitable access to necessary care. Instituting such standards would bring Canada up to par in the developed world.

Guided by best available evidence, such coverage would also foster safer, more appropriate use of medicines – potentially making Canada a world leader in the quality of medicine use.

Ensuring universal access to medically necessary prescription drugs is not only the ethical thing to do, it can also be the economically responsible thing to do. Research shows that a universal, public pharmacare system – one coordinated across provinces in ways similar to how federal, provincial, and territorial governments purchase vaccines and blood supply products – would achieve equity of access goals while saving Canadians between \$4-billion and \$11-billion per year.

Indeed, comparable countries that integrate drug coverage into their universal, public health care system achieve more equitable access to medicines at far lower total cost than Canada spends on our system today.

Canadians support public coverage for medicines of proven value-for-money in our health care system. A recent national survey by the Angus Reid Institute found that a vast majority of Canadians (87%) support adding prescription medicines to Canadian medicare. This support exists “across the board” in terms of regions, age groups, incomes, and education levels. Universal, public pharmacare is also supported by health professions, unions, policy experts, businesses, citizens groups, health charities, health executives, municipalities, and provincial governments.

Your campaign promised a better Canada including a federal government that will not let problems of the past persist when there is an opportunity to improve the lives of Canadians.

Pharmacare is the unfinished business of the Canadian healthcare system. Your government is in the fortunate position to expand medicare’s public mandate to include prescription drugs, and ensure a sunnier future for all Canadians as a result. You can count on our support as you plan a course for doing so.

Yours sincerely,

[Signatories listed following French version of letter below.]

17 novembre 2015

Monsieur le Premier ministre,

Nous vous prions d'accepter toutes nos félicitations pour votre récente élection comme 23e premier ministre du Canada.

Des discussions importantes sur l'identité canadienne et nos valeurs fondamentales se sont tenues tout au long de la campagne électorale et au cours des semaines qui ont suivi votre entrée en fonction. Les sondages révèlent de façon soutenue que parmi ces valeurs auxquelles la population canadienne est attachée, se trouvent celles qui sous-tendent notre système de santé: en particulier, la conviction que tous les habitants de ce pays doivent avoir accès à des soins de santé de qualité.

Nous vous écrivons en tant que professionnels et chercheurs de la santé. Comme vous, nous sommes préoccupés par l'état actuel du système universel de soins de santé du Canada. Bientôt, votre gouvernement invitera les premiers ministres et les ministres de la Santé du pays à discuter d'un nouvel accord sur la santé. Nous voulons attirer votre attention sur l'importance de mettre à l'agenda l'assurance-médicaments. .

Ce sujet devrait figurer haut sur la liste des priorités en matière de santé pour les raisons suivantes.

L'Organisation mondiale de la Santé (OMS) nous rappelle le caractère essentiel des produits pharmaceutiques pour la santé et le bien-être des populations. L'OMS soutient que tous les pays devraient garantir un accès universel aux médicaments requis. En conformité avec cette recommandation, tous les pays développés dotés d'un système universel de soins de santé offrent déjà une couverture universelle aux médicaments prescrits, à l'exception du Canada.

En effet, contrairement aux autres pays comparables, le système public de soins de santé du Canada cesse dès que la patiente ou le patient se présente en pharmacie pour se procurer le médicament prescrit.

Des millions de Canadiennes et de Canadiens n'ont aucune couverture d'assurance-médicaments et des millions d'autres ont une couverture insuffisante. On observe que près d'un quart des Canadiennes et Canadiens signalent qu'eux-mêmes ou des membres de leur famille n'ont pu obtenir leurs médicaments d'ordonnance en raison des coûts.

Il est clairement démontré que les obstacles financiers aux médicaments ont un impact négatif sur l'état de santé. Ils se traduisent également par des hausses inutiles dans l'utilisation des services médicaux et hospitaliers.

L'adoption de normes nationales pour une couverture universelle des médicaments requis permettrait de s'approcher de l'objectif central d'une politique sur le médicament, c'est-à-dire assurer à toute la population canadienne un accès équitable aux soins nécessaires. Une telle politique permettrait au Canada de rattraper les autres pays développés et mettre fin à ce retard qui

ne fait pas honneur à notre pays. Une couverture universelle aux médicaments favoriserait également l'utilisation plus sécuritaire et adéquate des médicaments – offrant une opportunité pour le Canada de devenir un chef de file mondial quant à la qualité de l'usage des médicaments.

Assurer un accès universel aux médicaments d'ordonnance est non seulement une mesure éthique, mais aussi, une mesure économiquement responsable. La recherche démontre qu'un système d'assurance-médicaments universel et public – coordonné à travers toutes les provinces de manière similaire à la façon dont les gouvernements fédéral, provinciaux et territoriaux achètent les vaccins et les produits sanguins – permettrait de répondre aux préoccupations d'équité et d'accès, tout en pavant la voie à d'importantes économies de l'ordre de quatre à onze milliards de dollars par année.

Il est démontré que des pays comparables qui intègrent la couverture du médicament dans leur système universel de santé obtiennent un accès plus équitable aux médicaments, et ce, à des coûts totaux de loin inférieurs à ceux qu'engage actuellement le Canada.

La population canadienne appuie la couverture publique des médicaments qui ont fait leurs preuves quant à leur rapport qualité-prix. Un récent sondage national effectué par l'Institut Angus Reid a déterminé qu'une vaste majorité de Canadiennes et de Canadiens (87 %) est favorable à l'ajout des médicaments sur ordonnance au système canadien de soins de santé. Cet appui se confirme sur tous les plans, peu importe la région, le groupe d'âge, le revenu des familles ou le niveau d'instruction. L'assurance-médicaments publique universelle jouit également de l'appui des professions de la santé, des syndicats, des experts en politiques publiques, des entreprises, des groupes de citoyens, des organismes de bienfaisance en santé, des cadres oeuvrant en santé, des municipalités et des gouvernements provinciaux.

Votre campagne a mis l'accent sur la promesse d'un Canada meilleur, où le gouvernement fédéral ne laissera plus les problèmes du passé empoisonner l'avenir, lorsqu'une solution éprouvée s'offre pour améliorer la vie des Canadiennes et Canadiens.

L'actuelle couverture déficiente des médicaments constitue ce dossier qui empoisonne le système canadien de soins de santé. Votre gouvernement se trouve en position unique pour résoudre ce problème, élargir le mandat public de l'assurance-maladie afin d'y inclure les médicaments sur ordonnance, et assurer ainsi un meilleur avenir pour toutes les Canadiennes et tous les Canadiens. Sachez, monsieur le Premier ministre, que vous pouvez compter sur notre appui alors que vous préparez vos plans pour atteindre cet objectif.

Veillez agréer, monsieur le Premier ministre, l'expression de notre très haute considération,

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