



CANADIAN FEDERATION
OF NURSES UNIONS
LA FÉDÉRATION CANADIENNE
DES SYNDICATS D'INFIRMIÈRES
ET INFIRMIERS

Canada's nurses applaud billions in savings found in PBO report on pharmacare

Thursday September 28, 2017 (Ottawa) – Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) President, Linda Silas, responded to the Parliamentary Budget Office's (PBO) costing document on the establishment of a national pharmacare program, commissioned by the Commons Health Committee and released today.

"Beyond a shadow of a doubt, the PBO report confirms for Canadians that a national pharmacare program will generate substantial savings – in the order of billions per year!" said CFNU President, Linda Silas. "In even better news, the PBO's costing amounts to a worst-case scenario – with calculations based on the costly Quebec medicines list – meaning there's potential for even greater savings."

The PBO report estimated that savings of approximately \$4.2 billion per year would be achieved with a pharmacare plan. Specifically, an estimated \$19 billion in net spending would replace the over \$23 billion spent on applicable drugs in Canada referred to in the PBO report, according to 2015-2016 figures. As the basis for calculations, the report used the Quebec medicines list, or formulary, which is Canada's most expensive, with the highest rate of annual growth in prescription drug costs per capita in all of Canada.

"The PBO has done a thorough job within the limited terms of reference given to it by the Health Committee, but there are many things not considered in this report," said Silas. "A well-built pharmacare program would result in billions more in savings for Canadians by choosing a less costly formulary – such as those being successfully used in other provinces and countries – and by factoring in gains in administrative efficiencies, the ending of tax subsidies to employers for prescription coverage, changes to prescribing practices based on medical evidence and, of course, great improvements to public health."

Canada is the only industrialized country with universal Medicare that does not provide for its people universal coverage for prescription medications. Prescription drug prices have risen rapidly over the past 20 years, surpassing physician fees to become the second most expensive budget item in the delivery of Canadian health care.

In the absence of pharmacare, millions of people in Canada are suffering. Recent polling by Angus Reid found that nearly 25% of Canadian households include someone who is not taking their prescription medicines as prescribed because of cost. Over 8 million working people in Canada do not have employer-funded extended medical benefits.

"On a daily basis, Canada's nurses bear witness to the deterioration of patients' health due to a lack of access to affordable medications," said Silas. "Too often preventable tragedies occur, and this has motivated the CFNU's nearly two-decade's campaign to convince Canadian political leaders of the need for a universal plan for prescription drugs."

"Now it's time for the Trudeau government to do the common-sense thing: make pharmacare a reality!" Silas concluded.

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) is Canada's largest nurses' organization representing nearly 200,000 nurses and student nurses. The CFNU has been advocating for national discussions on key health priorities, such as a national prescription drug plan, a comprehensive approach to long-term and continuing care, greater attention to health human resources, and federal government engagement on the future of public health care.

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