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Releases

Canada’s Labour Leaders Urge Premiers to Collaborate on a National Universal Pharmacare Plan

National, Provincial and Territorial Labour Leaders encourage Canada’s Premiers to unite behind a universal, single-payer, public prescription drug coverage program. In addition to giving every Canadian access to life-saving prescriptions, a universal Pharmacare plan will free up money for much needed investment in health care.

Saint Andrews, NB - During the Council of the Federation meeting in Saint Andrews, NB, Labour leaders from across the country united to deliver a message to Canada’s Premiers – collaboration is critical.

“Canada’s Premiers will soon be asked to support a Pharmacare plan built on a simple principle - equal access. No matter where in Canada you live, you should be able to access the medications you require to live a healthy life,” said Irene Lanzinger, President of the British Columbia Federation of Labour (BCFED).

Between 2006 and 2015 Canada wasted $62 billion health care dollars without a Pharmacare plan. We waste $7.3 billion a year, or $14,000 every minute of every day, monies, that with an additional $1 billion investment in public sector spending could be redirected within our health care system.

“The research is clear; a national Pharmacare plan could save British Columbians $1.14 billion per year. Think of the potential investment to be made in British Columbia’s health care system with a savings of that magnitude. The benefit to the people of British Columbia is enormous. $415 million could be allocated to help seniors, providing six million more public home care visits, that is nearly 16,243 more seniors who would receive daily homecare visits per year,” said Lanzinger.

“With another $415 million, we could build 78 more community health centres, providing 390,000 more British Columbia residents with high quality integrated care that would respond to both their physical and mental health needs. A $51 million investment could provide 850 more public long-term care beds per year in our province, and with the remaining $258 million, British Columbia could hire additional nurses and health care workers, invest in hospitals, put an end to hallway health care. Think of the impact and net benefit to British Columbia with those additional investments in Canadians health and well-being,” Lanzinger added.

Without Pharmacare, between 370 and 640 Canadians with ischemic heart disease prematurely lose their lives, every year. Between 270 and 420 working-age Canadians with diabetes die prematurely every year, the data suggests that between 550 to 670 older working age Canadians (55-64) die each year, before their time.

“Without a universal single-payer Pharmacare plan - up to 70,000 Canadians suffer avoidable health decline and hospitalization every year. That’s roughly the population of Prince George. Imagine if the entire population of Prince George was unnecessarily hospitalized every year, we would demand preventative measures from our government. Universal Pharmacare is that preventative measure, and we’re demanding action from our governments,” said Lanzinger.

Every developed country with a universal health care system provides universal coverage of prescription drugs – except Canada. In a country like Canada, no one should be forced to skip their medications or otherwise ignore their doctor’s orders because of costs. Doing so only leads to additional pressures on our health care systems, and that costs everyone more in the long run.

“The only plan that will deliver better health outcomes, while saving Canadians money, is a universal single-payer Pharmacare system,” said Hassan Yussuff, President of the Canadian Labour Congress.

In addition to urging that Premiers to support a universal Pharmacare plan, of which the federal advisory council is expected to make recommendations on how to implement, Presidents of provincial and territorial labour federations highlighted for Premiers the need and importance of strengthening the relationship with labour in their communities.

To build inclusive, strong and prosperous provinces, we must collaborate to support the most vulnerable among us. We must also work together to develop poverty reduction strategies that include a recognition of the needs for a living wage, decent working conditions and access to affordable housing.

Together, Canada’s provincial and territorial labour federations give voice to over three million workers, represented by the Alberta Federation of Labour, British Columbia Federation of Labour, Canadian Labour Congress, Manitoba Federation of Labour, New Brunswick Federation of Labour, Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, Northern Territories Federation of Labour, Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, Ontario Federation of Labour, Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour, Fédération des travailleurs et travailleises du Québec, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and Yukon Federation of Labour.