

Dear Better Pharmacare Coalition,

Thank you for your open letter to the New Democratic Party regarding your views on how the BC Pharmacare program can best serve British Columbians.

The NDP started the Pharmacare program in 1973 and improved it over time to ensure its long-term sustainability and effectiveness. During our time in Opposition, we have regularly worked with patients, their families and organizations to get specific drugs and treatments to those who need them through public discussion and advocacy.

The NDP supports getting drugs to people in the safest and fastest way possible. We support improvements to the drug approval process that will enhance transparency, accountability, clarify the roles of advice and decision-making bodies, include public members, and improve the timeliness of approvals. We further support maximizing the value for patients in procurement policies and will develop strategies to achieve this.

The NDP has been very concerned that British Columbia's families and seniors have been paying more out of pocket for healthcare and prescription drugs. According to Statistics Canada, the cost for private supplementary coverage for prescription drugs and the now-de-listed rehab, eye care and podiatry services, increased from \$256 per household in 1997 to more than \$480 today. These are significant increased costs, particularly when you compare them with the average wage increases in Canada, which were about 2.3% per year during the same period.

The BC Liberal government's decision to move away from universal drug coverage for seniors was clearly wrong and is forcing seniors and other British Columbians to make difficult choices. New Democrats strenuously opposed this policy change and as resources permit, a New Democrat government will work to improve the situation.

A New Democrat government will also work with other provinces and territories and cooperate with the federal government in establishing a Canada-wide prescription drug program, phasing in drug coverage for all citizens, beginning with catastrophic drug costs. The national program would reduce the cost of prescription drugs for average Canadians and save billions of dollars from provincial health care budgets by implementing a bulk-purchasing plan.

Since its inception in 2007, the NDP has consistently raised concerns about the composition of the government's pharmaceutical task force. We do not believe that the development of public policy should be dominated by an industry that has not always acted in the public interest. This should in no way be misinterpreted to suggest we are against improving the timeliness of drug approvals. In fact our commitment to add resources to the independent evaluation process confirms just the opposite. Our platform commits to increase the budget for the Therapeutics Initiative by 50% annually and enshrine the funding through legislation to enhance its independence and timeliness. This builds upon the recommendations of an independent academic committee commissioned by the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Medicine to examine the effectiveness of the Initiative.

The BC NDP is committed to working with patients, health professionals, independent experts, and industry to continually improve B.C.'s Pharmacare program.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss these issues with your organization.

Sincerely,

BC's New Democrats  
Election 2009