

April 28, 2020

**SENT VIA EMAIL**

The Honourable John Horgan, M.L.A.  
Premier of British Columbia  
[premier@gov.bc.ca](mailto:premier@gov.bc.ca)

Dear Premier,

**Unifor calls on Provincial Premiers for emergency drug coverage for all**

Since COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, Canada and the rest of the world have been responding to what will surely be remembered as the biggest health, social and economic crisis of our time.

Provincial governments, along with the federal government, have indeed stepped up to implement significant emergency support measures to deal with the pandemic. As this crisis continues, however, we urge you to address one of the most glaring and pressing issues facing British Columbians: the lack of access to prescription medication.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 8 million Canadians did not have prescription drug coverage and an estimated 3 million Canadians did not take medicines prescribed by their doctors because they couldn't afford them. In a matter of weeks, millions of Canadians have been laid off with few of them having any health care benefits to carry them through this crisis.

British Columbia does have the infrastructure for public drug coverage through PharmaCare, including Fair PharmaCare and numerous targeted PharmaCare plans. The government's changes in 2019 to Fair PharmaCare that eliminated or reduced deductibles and co-payments for hundreds of thousands of lower-income households was a positive step in making prescription drugs more accessible.

Given the devastating impact of COVID-19 on British Columbia jobs and incomes, many people are falling through the cracks and may not be able to afford the medications that they need. We acknowledge that the government has implemented some positive changes in light of COVID-19 – such as granting temporary Medical Services Plan (MSP) coverage for those impacted by the crisis, including those with temporary work or study permits, and temporary foreign workers.

However, we must assist those who lost workplace coverage and others who may not be able to afford the dispensing fees, premiums, deductibles or co-payments in the existing provincial drug programs. The lack of access to prescription drugs during this crisis should be treated as an additional health emergency.

Unifor is calling on the provincial government to take the following emergency measures to ensure that British Columbians have access to prescription drugs immediately:

- 1) Work in coordination with the federal government and provide the resources needed in order to ensure that all laid off workers are supported in existing provincial drug programs.
- 2) Waive all dispensing fees, premiums, deductibles or co-payments for people covered by the provincial drug programs.
- 3) Ensure that if any worker must go on leave for COVID-19 related quarantine or self-isolation, they maintain drug coverage through their employer or is eligible for coverage under provincial drug programs.

So many people right now are struggling with the choice between putting food on the table, keeping a roof over their head and paying for the medications they need to stay healthy. These are choices that no one should be forced to make.

Sincerely,



Gavin McGarrigle  
Unifor Western Regional Director

cc. The Honourable Harry Bains, M.L.A., Minister of Labour, The Honourable Adrian Dix, M.L.A., Minister of Health.

GM/klcpe343