

April 28, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL

The Honourable Jason Kenney, P.C., M.L.A.
Premier of Alberta
premier@gov.ab.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 Albertans: 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.

Alberta does have a number of targeted public programs for drug coverage. Namely, the Alberta Adult Health Benefit for some low-income households; Alberta Child Health Benefit for children in low-income families; Coverage for Seniors program; and chronic and high-cost diseases plans like the Specialized High Cost Drug Program, Outpatient Cancer Drug Benefit, Palliative Care Coverage Program and Insulin Pump Therapy Program. The province's Non-Group Coverage for supplementary health benefits, delivered by Alberta Blue Cross, does capture a large number of Albertans who do not have private workplace plans.

Given the devastating impact of COVID-19 on Alberta jobs and incomes, many people are falling through the cracks and may not be able to afford the medications that they need. The measures to provide a maximum of 30-day prescription drug supplies (instead of 90-day) has also been a challenge for many people, especially seniors. It was encouraging to see that the

government has reduced the co-pay fee in seniors' and non-group plans cover extra dispensing fees resulting from that measure.

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 Albertans have access to prescription drugs immediately:

- 1) Work in coordination with the federal government and provide the resources needed in order to set up existing provincial drug programs to cover all laid-off workers.
- 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 Jason Copping, M.L.A., Minister of Labour and Immigration, The Honourable Tyler Shandro, M.L.A., Minister of Health

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