

April 28, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL

The Honourable Brian Pallister, M.L.A.
Premier of Manitoba
premier@leg.gov.mb.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 the people of Manitoba: 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.

Manitoba does have the infrastructure for public drug coverage through the Pharmacare Program. The income-based Pharmacare program is an important support system for those who are not covered by other government or private plans.

However, given the devastating impact of COVID-19 on Manitoba jobs and incomes, many people are falling through the cracks and may not be able to afford the medications that they need. The government's measures to restrict drugs to 30-day supplies may have been intended to prevent stockpiling, but it has also resulted in added dispensing fee costs and additional challenges for Manitobans, especially seniors.

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 Manitobans 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 Scott Fielding, M.L.A., Minister of Finance, The Honourable Cameron Friesen, M.L.A., Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

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