

April 27, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL

The Honourable Dwight Ball, M.H.A.
Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador
premier@gov.nl.ca

Dear Premier,

Re: 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 has 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 Newfoundland and Labrador: 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.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program (NLPDP) primarily targets those who do not have private insurance or are covered by other government programs. The five core plans – Assurance Plan, Access Plan, 65 Plus Plan, Select Needs Plan, Foundation Plan – are certainly important in providing better access to prescription drugs for many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Given the devastating impact of COVID-19 on Newfoundland and Labrador jobs and incomes, many people are falling through the cracks and may not be able to afford the medications that they need. The move to providing 30-day prescription drug supplies (instead of 90-days) has also been a challenge for many people, especially seniors. It was encouraging to hear the Health Minister commit to helping people under the Foundation Plan and 65 Plus Plan to 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 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians 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,



Linda MacNeil
Unifor Atlantic Regional Director

cc. The Honourable Christopher Mitchelmore, M.H.A., Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, The Honourable John Haggie, M.H.A., Minister of Health and Community Services.

LM/klcpe343