

April 27, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL

The Honourable Stephen McNeil, M.L.A.
Premier of Nova Scotia
premier@novascotia.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 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 Nova Scotia: 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.

Nova Scotia does have a number of targeted public programs for drug coverage. Namely, the Family Pharmacare Program for those with no other coverage; Seniors' Pharmacare Program; Palliative Care Drug Program; Department of Community Services Pharmacare Benefits; Drug Assistance for Cancer Patients Program; and Low Income Pharmacare for Children program.

Given the devastating impact of COVID-19 on Nova Scotia jobs and incomes, many people are falling through the cracks and may not be able to afford the medications that they need. We do credit the government with its recent announcements to waive prescription co-payments for clients of the Income Assistance Program and Low Income Pharmacare for Children program, along with covering the extra dispensing fees for those impacted by limiting refills to 30 days (instead of 90 days).

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 Nova Scotians 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 Labi Kousoulis, M.L.A., Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, The Honourable Randy Delorey, M.L.A., Minister of Health and Wellness.

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