

April 27, 2020

**SENT VIA EMAIL**

The Honourable Blaine Higgs, M.L.A.  
Premier of New Brunswick  
[premier@gnb.ca](mailto:premier@gnb.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 New Brunswick: 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.

New Brunswick does have a number of targeted public programs for drug coverage. Namely, the New Brunswick Drug Plan (for those without coverage under a private or other government plan, with some exceptions) and New Brunswick Prescription Drug Program (for specific beneficiary groups).

Given the devastating impact of COVID-19 on New Brunswick jobs and incomes, many people are falling through the cracks and may not be able to afford the medications that they need. The province made the right move with its decision to reverse the directive by the New Brunswick College of Pharmacists to temporarily restrict prescription refills to 30 days. The impact on low-income residents and seniors was significant with this restriction.

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 New Brunswickers 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 Trevor Holder, M.L.A., Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, The Honourable Hugh Flemming, M.L.A., Minister of Health

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