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RTOERO

Federal election 2021 op-ed – pharmacare

It's time for national pharmacare

The pandemic has revealed much about health inequities. Certain segments of the population have been harder hit.

There's another health system issue that puts most Canadians at a disadvantage. Canada is the only country in the world that has universal health care but that doesn't also provide universal drug coverage.

Think about it. We have access to doctors and diagnoses without being out of pocket. But we don't have the same access to the medications that might be needed from those recommendations.

During this federal election campaign, the need for a national pharmacare program should be one of the hot button issues.

Canadians consistently pay among the highest prices for prescription drugs. Ten per cent of our citizens do not have adequate coverage to meet their needs. One in four households can't afford to fill their prescriptions.

Pharmacare is now fragmented, with a few provinces offering some drug coverage. We're left with a patchwork of over 100 public prescription drug plans and 100,000 private plans – confusing and incomplete.

The solution demands a national initiative. The economic case is clear. Universal coverage would be cost-effective, centralizing infrastructure and providing Canada with superior leverage for negotiating drug prices.

National pharmacare would also allow for better monitoring of medications, and reduce the burden on other parts of the health care system. For instance, one in six hospitalizations could be avoided if prescription drugs were used more appropriately

RTOERO is a trusted voice for healthy, active living in retirement. We are the largest national provider of non-profit group health benefits for education community retirees. Pharmacare is of prime importance to our 81,000-plus members, and to Canadians of all ages and stages.

Politicians have been talking about a national pharmacare program for decades. It's past time for any party that wants to form a government to commit to how they would

implement or accelerate national pharmacare, over what period, and they would cooperate with the provinces to make such a program work.

We want to see a national health plan that ensures access to the medications that are essential to our well-being. So that we can have a healthier population and cut costs too. And so that anyone who is financially strapped doesn't have to choose between purchasing the necessities of everyday life or medical prescriptions.