



## **It's time for national pharmacare**

The pandemic has revealed much about health inequities. Over the course of the past two years, 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 provincial 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.

Like other provinces, Ontario does offer some drug coverage. The Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program covers most of the cost of approximately 5,000 medications for people age 65 and up (some qualify before that age). We also have benefits through Ontario Works, the Ontario Disability Support Program and the Trillium Drug Program; and there is coverage for young people up to age 24.

All of this is helpful. But it's not enough.

Ontario's plans are part of a Canadian 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, centralize infrastructure and provide 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 in Ontario to commit to how they would: 1) implement or accelerate national pharmacare, and over what period; 2) cooperate with the other 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, while cutting costs, ensuring that anyone who is financially strapped doesn't have to choose between purchasing the necessities of everyday life or medical prescriptions.