

Feb. 29, 2024

Overview

After days, weeks, and years of anticipation, today the federal government announced the introduction of [Bill 64: An Act respecting pharmacare](#) in the House of Commons.

Following the tabling of the legislation, Health Minister Mark Holland accompanied by NDP Health Critic Don Davies and numerous Liberal colleagues held a media event at a downtown Ottawa community health centre to profile the government's intention to provide universal access to contraceptives and diabetes medications. While both Holland and Davies were very collegial, the media used the opportunity to press both on what was AND what was not included in the legislation.

Pressed on the cost to make universal access to contraceptive and diabetes medications a reality, Holland said it was too early to know an exact number as the program is not expected to be fully underway until the 2025/26 budget year following negotiations with provinces and territories. Holland eventually admitted that a total budget would likely be in the \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion range. Davies was asked if this agreement was truly a win for the NDP given it only includes single-payer access to birth control and diabetes medications rather than a full suite of drugs. Davies responded by saying today's bill creates a legislated framework for further expansion and legislates the government to create a national bulk purchasing plan and essential medicines list.

Outside the confines of the announcement, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh praised the efforts of his NDP team and pharmacare activists who "after 30 years of Liberal broken promises" made today's legislation a reality.

Legislation Highlights

Diabetes and Contraceptive Coverage:

6 (1) The Minister may, if the Minister has entered into an agreement with a province or territory to do so, make payments to the province or territory in order to increase any existing public pharmacare coverage — and to provide universal, single-payer, first-dollar coverage — for specific prescription drugs and related products intended for contraception or the treatment of diabetes.

National Formulary:

8 (1) The Minister must, after discussions with the provinces and territories, request that the Canadian Drug Agency prepare, no later than the first anniversary of the day on which this Act receives royal assent, a list of essential prescription drugs and related products to inform the development of a national formulary that will establish the scope of prescription drugs and related products to which Canadians should have access under national universal pharmacare.

National Bulk Purchasing Strategy:

9 The Minister must, after discussions with the provinces and territories, request that the Canadian Drug Agency develop, in collaboration with partners and stakeholders and no later than the first anniversary of the day on which this Act receives royal assent, a national bulk purchasing strategy for prescription drugs and related products to support the principles set out in paragraphs 4(a) to (d).

Committee of Experts:

11 (1) The Minister must, no later than 30 days after the day on which this Act receives royal assent, establish a committee of experts, and provide for its membership, to make recommendations respecting options for the operation and financing of national, universal, single-payer pharmacare.

In the media

- Government of Canada News Release: [Government of Canada Introduces Legislation for First Phase of National Universal Pharmacare](#)
- Globe and Mail: [Pharmacare legislation has been tabled. Here's what you need to know](#)
- CBC: [Ottawa unveils national pharmacare plan that covers diabetes, contraception to start](#)
- CTV News: [New pharmacare framework bill includes plan to cover diabetes medications, contraceptives](#)

What's next

Now that the legislation is tabled, the legislative process begins in the House of Commons. Before being passed and moved on to the Senate, the bill will need to be debated by MPs and be studied and debated at the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health. This will allow witnesses the opportunity to share their views and opinions relating to pharmacare and for potential amendments to the legislation to be debated.

Timing is unclear as to exactly when we will see this legislation become law, but a best guess is that we could see the bill passed in the House of Commons and moved to the Senate by the summer. Of course, this depends on various factors including other government legislative priorities and possible filibusters by opposition parties which can delay proceedings in the House.

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