

National Pharmacare: Where are we now?

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The First Ministers meeting on *The Future of Health Care*, held September 15 2004, succeeded in producing a shared agenda to renew health care in Canada, focusing on a consensus to ensure Canadians have access to the care they need, when they need it.

Prime Minister Paul Martin announced \$41 billion of new federal funding to support 'a 10-year plan to strengthen health care'. This money will be made available through the Canada Health Transfer and will also begin to address the issue of national pharmacare. An additional \$500 million has been allotted to help progress catastrophic drug coverage and home care. A task force was mandated at the meeting to develop and implement a national pharmacare strategy.

The ministerial task force is charged with developing a pharmaceutical strategy for implementation by June 30, 2006, (Please see table at end of the article for more details).

Health ministers met for a second time in mid-October to discuss in detail the goals outlined during the First Ministers meeting in September. In October it was decided that the National Pharmaceutical Strategy task force would be chaired by Federal Minister of Health, Ujjal Dosanjh, and co-chaired by British Columbia's Minister of Health, Colin Hansen. The provinces have agreed to focus on studying bulk-buying, and are committed to seeing the 10 year plan to improve health care come to fruition. Additional action items that were looked at more carefully at the meeting in October include: wait time reduction, improving access, home care, primary care reform, access to care in the north, prevention and health promotion, innovations, accountability and dispute resolution. The Ministers hope to base their goals on the principles of universality, accessibility, portability, comprehensiveness and public administration set out by the Canada Health Act.

Federal health minister Ujjal Dosanjh and his provincial counterparts 'decided to reflect on how to proceed and will meet again in January'.

In the meantime, while it appears unlikely that progress will be made with national pharmacare in the immediate future, there is a genuine ambition to create a system where Canadians' needs are met. Information regarding the progress of national pharmacare is not easily forthcoming. Correspondence with government media staff has not brought any additional information to light. This could point to either a lack of actual work being done or a lack of transparency regarding this issue.

Ministerial Task Force for National Pharmaceutical Strategy:	
Catastrophic Drug Coverage	Determine cost options, develop & assess options.
National Drug Formulary	Establish a common drug formulary for participating jurisdictions.
Drug Approval Process	Access to breakthrough drugs for “unmet health needs” will be accelerated through improvements to the approval process.
Safety Surveillance	Evaluation of ‘real-world’ drug safety and effectiveness.
Buying Strategies	Purchasing strategies that will allow provinces to obtain the best prices for drugs and vaccines.
Prescribing Procedures	Ensuring action that drugs are used only when needed and the right drug is used for the right problem.
Electronic Health Records	Broaden the practice of e-prescribing through accelerated development and deployment of electronic health records.
Non-Patented Drug Access	Accelerate access to non-patented drugs & achieve international parity on prices of non-patented drugs.
Cost Analysis	Analysis of cost drivers & effectiveness, using best practice models.