



PRESS RELEASE

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A united Québec front demands that Ottawa implement a public, universal pharmacare plan

Ottawa, March 1, 2019 – A number of Québec labour and civil society organizations are urging the federal government to implement a bona fide public, universal pharmacare plan. According to them, Ottawa would be making a mistake by wanting to reproduce the hybrid model in Québec, where the existence of private and public insurance plans has caused spiralling costs and profound inequities.

“Canada is the only OECD country with a public health insurance plan that does not include drug insurance,” pointed out the president of the FTQ, Daniel Boyer. *“In this respect, we welcomed the creation of the Advisory Board on the Implementation of a National Pharmacare Program in 2018. However, we are concerned that the federal government will succumb to the temptation to reproduce the Québec hybrid model, which has serious weaknesses.”*

The public drug insurance plan set up by the Québec government is only accessible to citizens who don't have access to a group insurance plan at work,” stated the vice-president of the CSN, Caroline Senneville. *“This coexistence of a public plan in combination with several private plans deprives us of a powerful bargaining tool with the pharmaceutical companies. The same medication can be ten times more expensive in Canada than in New Zealand. Studies show that the implementation of a plan that is completely public and universal can lower the cost of medications by 20 to 40%. This can represent savings in the range of 1 to 3 billion dollars for the entire society, in Québec alone.”*

While median expenditures in medications per resident is \$603 for the OECD countries, the per capita expenditure for medications in Québec is \$1,087, the organizations pointed out. Today, expenditures for prescribed medications amount to nearly 9 billion dollars annually in Québec alone.

“The cost of drug coverage in our private group insurance plans is spiralling,” stated the secretary-treasurer of the CSQ, Luc Beauregard. *“Drug insurance premiums have risen from 5 to 8% a year over the last few years. The result? An increasing number of unions are deciding to discontinue their group insurance plans, which is the only way to have access to the public drug insurance plan, and are thus losing their disability insurance,*

dental insurance and other benefits coverage. In short, the current Québec hybrid plan threatens many of our social safeguards.”

The organizations deplore the many inequalities in the hybrid plan in Québec. *“The contributions required, the amount of the deductibles, even the list of medications covered differs from one plan to another,”* denounced the president of the APTS, Carolle Dubé. *“While everyone should be equal regarding access to the public healthcare system, access to medications is clearly not equitable for everyone. The Canadian plan must avoid this pitfall and be decisively universal.”*

“Because of the rising costs of medications, many citizens can simply not afford them,” stated the spokesperson for the TRPOCB, Mercédez Roberge. *“Nearly 10% of the population in Québec do not have access to the medications prescribed for them, because they lack the means to pay for them. This particularly affects the most vulnerable people in terms of health, such as the elderly, those with a handicap or living with a chronic disease. This is a real public health problem that has a negative impact on our entire health system.”*

“Several employers already contribute to varying degrees to their employees’ group insurance plan,” stated the vice-president of the FIQ, Shirley Dorismond. *“It is not a question of exempting them from their obligations. The financing of a public, universal pharmacare plan must be based on the repatriation of these contributions, just like those of the employees.”*

For the Union des consommateurs spokesperson, Élisabeth Gibeau, the Québec hybrid plan goes completely against insurance logic. *“The private plans cover insured persons who are considered a “good risk,” people who work and who, generally, are in better health. The majority of those who are unemployed or retired, who tend to take more medication, are covered by the public plan. The additional costs fall on the government, while the insurance companies reap the profits,”* she declared.

The organizations are cautioning the federal government about the powerful lobby which is organizing to stop the implementation of a public, universal plan. *“There is only one completely public, universal plan that would be beneficial for the government, employers and citizens. There is no reason not to move forward,”* stated the spokespersons.

About

The Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) represents more than 600,000 workers in Québec.

Present in both the public and private sectors, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) represents 300,000 workers, mainly in Québec.

The Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ) represents more than 200,000 members, nearly 130,000 of them in the Québec public sector.

The Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique du réseau de la santé et des services sociaux (APTS) represents approximately 55,000 members in Québec.

The Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec (FIQ) represents 76,000 nursing and cardio-respiratory healthcare professionals working in Québec healthcare institutions and social services.

The Union des consommateurs is a non-profit body that represents 13 consumer-protection groups.

The Table des regroupements provinciaux d'organismes communautaires et bénévoles (TRPOCB) is made up of 44 provincial groups with more than 3,000 community groups in health and social services across Québec.

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SOURCES: FTQ, CSN, CSQ, FIQ, APTS, Union des consommateurs, TRPOCB

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