

National pharmacare plan is overdue

One of the common clauses to be included in contract negotiations is an employer-paid prescription insurance program, or pharmacare. This lifts the often burdensome cost of buying essential medicines from workers who might otherwise not be able to afford them, and is certainly in keeping with Canadians' concept of universally free and accessible medical care.

Still it is often an area in which employers are resistant to negotiation. Many don't feel it is the responsibility of the employer to provide such a benefit – and maybe they have a point. While UFCW Canada will always continue to get the most benefits for members through the collective bargaining process, including pharmacare, it is beyond time that Canada has a national pharmacare program in place.

Recently, the federal New Democrats and Jack Layton have stepped up the campaign to provide Canadians with universal prescription drug coverage. It simply makes sense. We are privileged in Canada to have one of the world's best universal medicare programs (not without its problems, of course, but that's another story), yet universal pharmacare is left out of the equation. According a recently published report, "most provinces now offer drug coverage for seniors and people on social assistance, and in some cases provide catastrophic drug coverage." Yet, one in five Canadians is underinsured for drug costs, and a staggering 3.5-million Canadians are without any drug coverage at all.

This is absolutely unacceptable. We are a wealthy society, and well able to sustain the well-being of our neighbours and communities. To have a situation where even working people have to decide between medicines they need and, say, paying the rent is simply not an option.

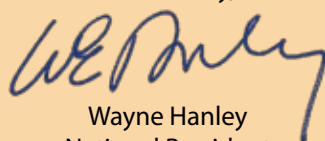
As Jack Layton has said, "Working Canadians are pulling me aside and telling me that costs for prescription medication are taking over their lives or the life of a loved one. Access to prescription drugs depends more on where you live and how much money you have than it does on need. This is wrong and needs to change."

The amount ordinary Canadians pay out-of-pocket for medication varies widely from province to province. In British Columbia average households pay \$314 per year for prescription drugs, while in Prince Edward Island they pay \$495. The NDP plan for pharmacare reform involves first ensuring that everyone is covered by such a program, and second on reducing the costs of prescription drugs. This requires a strong federal initiative, as provincial governments have, in the past, been resistant to reform while simply asking for more money to fund existing programs.

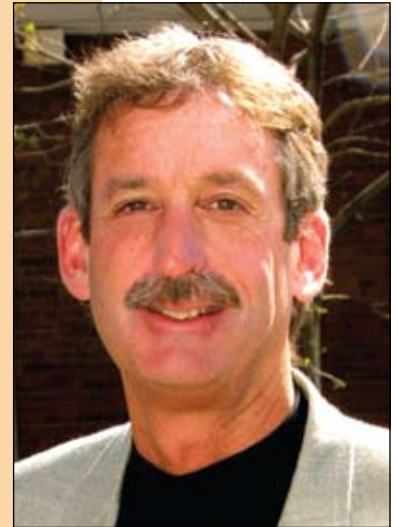
Universal pharmacare is not a pie-in-the-sky dream. It must be part-and-parcel of Canada's overall medicare coverage. If you are sick in this country, you get the best medical care available, and that must include the pharmaceuticals that are so important to many modern medical treatments. As Tommy Douglas, the founder of Canadian medicare, said of public health care in 1984, "We can't stand still. We can either go back or we can go forward."

It is incumbent on us – now and for future generations – to choose forward.

In solidarity,



Wayne Hanley
National President



National organizing support

"Welcome." is the title of a newly-produced UFCW Canada national office organizing flyer created to meet immediate needs of the Ontario Organizing Council last month. The eight-page letter-size publication is in full colour and contains numerous photos of UFCW Canada members submitted by local unions across the country.

"While this was created to fill an immediate need in a specific province, it is actually national in scope and not specific to Ontario," says UFCW Canada national president Wayne Hanley. "It can be used in any province or territory, and, in fact, isn't limited to use in organizing. It serves as a good introduction for new members as well."

The flyer is available from the national president's office for the use of locals and other chartered bodies across Canada. It is not yet available in French, but will be produced if there is interest from locals in Québec. This publication and other organizing materials can be produced in any language needed wherever numbers warrant.

"More and more in recent years, we have witnessed a growing need for printed materials in a variety of languages as various ethnic communities become part of the UFCW Canada family. We will always do what is needed in order to be able to communicate with our members as fully as possible," Brother Hanley says.

The "Welcome." brochure is the first of many new materials being produced by the national office in conjunction with the Ontario Organizing Council, with non-Ontario usage always being kept in mind. Even when the national office creates materials aimed at a specific organizing campaign or a campaign by one local union, we keep in mind that the end product needs to be national in scope. So if it is targetted locally, it can still be adapted to national use or in another community or campaign.

- For more information, contact the national president's office, attention Bob Linton

New members in Saskatchewan

UFCW Canada Local 1400 has welcomed new members at two locations in recent weeks, with certifications for 57 new members at the Saskatoon branch of McNally Robinson Book Sellers as well as six truck drivers at Prairie Pride Natural Foods, also in Saskatoon.

McNally Robinson is a Winnipeg-based chain of independent bookstores, with two stores in Winnipeg, one in Saskatoon, one in Calgary, and its newest outlet in New York City, in Nolita near Greenwich Village and Soho in Manhattan. New members in Saskatoon are in the process of electing a negotiating committee to begin bargaining for a first contract.

The drivers at Prairie Pride join 107 workers organized late last year by Local 1400 at the poultry processing and packing plant in northern Saskatoon. They voted overwhelmingly in favour of a first collective agreement at the new facility in February. The agreement includes a 16% wage improvement over its course, plus shift premiums, breaks, meal and boot allowances, benefits including vacation, pension (CCWIPP), dental, and health, and more.

Prairie Pride also operates a chick hatchery in nearby Grandora, Sask. with a current production of 300,000 chicks per week with a capacity to double that.

Meanwhile, Local 1400 members at another recently-opened natural food packinghouse - Nature Valley Farms, a natural and organic beef facility - ratified their first agreement in February as well. Located in Wolseley, Sask. (on the TransCanada Highway midway between Regina and the Manitoba border), workers at the new facility won workweek guarantees, entry to CCWIPP, various benefits and shift premiums, boot allowance, job postings, and wage increases in each year of the contract.

Nature Valley Farms also operates a slaughterhouse in nearby Neudorf, Sask. with a capacity of 1,250 head per week.

- With files from UFCW Canada Local 1400 and employer websites

Union wins vacation pay for LTD member

Where does a non-active member turn when they need help? The answer that pays off is "to the union".

For a member of UFCW Canada Local 1518 in British Columbia, it took him a while to realize that. But once he contacted the local about his situation, the situation was quickly addressed and remedied. He will be getting a cheque for owed vacation pay of approximately \$3,000.00.

"This is an example of how the union is

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A better choice for ballot solidarity

Focus on
Better Choice
Campaign

It remains unclear when a federal election will be called, but that isn't stopping union and social activists discussing the issues faced by Canadian workers.

"Our union, and all unions for that matter, fight hard for fair working conditions for members," says UFCW Canada national president Wayne Hanley. "But the work of the labour movement doesn't stop there. For example, Canadians enjoy the benefits of medicare, paid maternity leave, and employment standards because unions and labour organizations negotiated with the government on behalf of all workers. You could say that, when Canadians go to the polls, they are entering the collective bargaining process with the next government."

Earlier this year, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) launched the *Better Choice* campaign. Local teams of union activists have been busy plant-gating, making presentations at union meetings, and dropping off info at union halls across the country. The campaign centres on five key issues identified as important to workers for the next federal election. A national survey was conducted with 1,200 Canadians, 485 of them in union households. After extensive interviewing and polling, the following issues emerged as priorities: Protecting Jobs & Wages, Education & Skills Training, Protecting Pensions, Extending Medicare to Pharmacare, and Child Care for Working Families (see chart below for more details).

"The union plays two basic roles in two different arenas," says UFCW Canada national representative and political activist Andrew Mackenzie. "The first role is to fight for our members' jobs, which is done through negotiations with employers. The second role is to keep the pressure on

TOP 5 ISSUES	VOTE FOR CANDIDATES WHO WILL ...
1. Protecting Jobs & Wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deliver a \$10.00 an hour minimum wage • reject one-sided trade deals (like the softwood lumber agreement) • make sure tax incentives go to job creation and improving workers' skills • focus on new jobs through better public transit, more fuel-efficient cars, renewable energy, and retrofitting homes and businesses as a way of dealing seriously with climate change • commit to equality and close the wage gap for women and workers of colour
2. Education & Skills Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reform Employment Insurance (EI) to make it easier for workers to get retraining and paid training leave • make sure education and skills training are affordable for all • reverse the cuts to literacy and language training programs • provide training support and bridge programs for aboriginal, disabled, and foreign-trained workers • establish a national strategy to tackle the skills shortage
3. Protecting Pensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fix the Bankruptcy Act to protect workplace pensions • stop employers from avoiding corporate pension obligations by selling the company or its assets • increase benefits for the Canada Pensions Plan (CPP) and Old Age Security (OAS)
4. Extending Medicare to Pharmacare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up a national drug strategy that works just like Medicare • take on the pharmaceutical industry to cut working families' drug costs (e.g., patent reforms, bulk purchasing)
5. Child Care for Working Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set up a permanent national system of quality, not-for-profit child care • support early learning and child care programs so kids of working families don't miss out • set decent wages and benefits for workers who care for our children

those who make decisions on the Canadian economy and social programs." Mackenzie points out that politicians and other policy makers must be reminded of and recognize the value of work, and it is up to union members to educate themselves on the issues and vote for the candidates who will promote fair working conditions, better job security, and stronger social programs for all workers, regardless of when an election is called. "It is a civic and electoral act of solidarity," he says.

The CLC's *Better Choice* campaign reminds workers that all of us are, today, the stewards of social programs for future generations, and that it is our responsibility to make sure those to come won't have to ask us "Why did you let this happen?". With 3-million members across Canada, the labour movement can and *must* make a difference.

– *With files from the CLC*

Raise the minimum wage NOW!

The fight for a better minimum wage – earmarked at \$10.00 an hour – has been at the forefront of efforts by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and provincial federations of labour in recent months, and has stirred a groundswell of support across Canada.

“Over one million working people in Ontario earn less than \$10.00 an hour. They need a \$10.00 an hour minimum wage now,” says Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) president Wayne Samuelson.

According to a study by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the real value of the minimum wage is still far below what it was 30 years ago in every province in Canada. The low level of minimum wages is a major factor behind Canada’s high rates of poverty and economic inequality. Almost 5-million Canadians – including 1.2-million children – were living in poverty in 2003 according to the National Council of Welfare.

“The single most effective step to raise working families out of poverty is to raise the minimum wage,” says UFCW Canada national president Wayne Hanley.

– *With files from the OFL, www.ofl.ca*

**\$10/HR
NOW**

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committed to helping its members, even after they’ve long been off work and may not even be ‘official’ union members,” says Local 1518 secretary-treasurer Frank Pozzobon. “We are absolutely committed to providing the best we can to members, and are pleased to see that after the union got involved, the employer got busy and justice was done.”

The member, who worked for Canada Safety, was injured on the job a few years ago and went on long-term disability (LTD). Due to the difficult circumstances involved in going off work, he didn’t notice that he hadn’t been properly paid for an outstanding vacation balance.

He tried to resolve the problem on his own, but soon found himself the ball in an unending ping-pong game between corporate and store-level management. When he finally contacted Local 1518 to see what could be

done, the union went straight to the head office. They determined quickly that the member was owed about \$3,000.00 and assured it would be promptly remitted.

– *With files from UFCW Canada Local 1518*

Youth working together

The UFCW Canada national youth committee has announced that, due to the ongoing success of the program, it will once again be offering the Working Together Grant (WTG) for 2008. The grant money can be used for various endeavours such as raising awareness of youth initiatives, creating involvement, publicizing UFCW Canada, or raising funds for leukemia research. The deadline for applications is September 1, 2007.

– *For details or an application form, contact the UFCW Canada national office*

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