



Alternatives North

MEDIA RELEASE

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Canadians Can't Afford *Not* to Have a Public Drug Plan

Yellowknife/Ottawa – Alternatives North joins the Canadian Health Coalition today in releasing a groundbreaking report entitled *Life Before Pharmacare*. Starting fall of 2007, the CHC held a series of public hearings in communities across Canada, including Yellowknife. Over 250 Canadians gave testimony on how prescription drug costs affect them and their loved ones. The hearings were the first time Canadians had an opportunity to share their experiences and insights regarding prescription drug costs, availability and effectiveness.

Stories and issues raised by some of the dozen northerners who presented at the panel hearing in Yellowknife appear in the report. Spokesperson for Alternatives North, Ben McDonald, said that many northerners are now having difficulty getting the drugs they need. “What we were told makes the point quite clearly. Many northerners would benefit from a national Pharmacare program.”

Many Canadians have no drug coverage at all, and those who do are facing exorbitant and ever-increasing costs. “Too many Canadians are falling through the cracks. Now is the time for coordinated government action on a universal public drug plan,” said Kathleen Connors, CHC Chairperson. “In this serious economic downturn, Canadians are losing their drug plans as they lose their jobs. A public Pharmacare plan will not only provide medically-necessary drugs to all Canadians, regardless of where they live or work, it will also create more efficient spending in the health care system. We’ll get more and pay less,” added Connors.

Canada currently has a patchwork of private and public plans so full of holes that comprehensive drug coverage is not a reality for most. The result is an inequity reminiscent of the days before Medicare where people who can afford to pay for medications get them, and those who can't, don't. The report concludes that a universal public drug plan, cost-shared by federal and provincial/territorial governments and employers, and administered by provinces and territories, would result in better quality care and reduced costs.

Life Before Pharmacare is published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. To download the report or order a copy, visit their website: www.policyalternatives.ca

-30-

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