



About Essential Medicines

The Challenge:

Access to essential medicines is a fundamental human right, yet more than one million Canadians do not have prescription drug coverage.

For these individuals, choosing between paying for prescription medications or meeting basic needs is a constant struggle. While a number of provincial drug programs exist for targeted populations (including seniors, social assistance recipients and others), there is a significant gap in coverage, particularly for the working poor that lack access to workplace benefit plans.



The Solution:

Universal access to essential medication, supported by private and public sector collaboration.

As a not-for-profit GreenShield supports a fill-in-the-gaps model that ensures:

- 97% of Canadians retain access to drug coverage through a combination of public and private drug plans.¹
- The remaining coverage gaps are addressed through a targeted approach.
- That the more than 1 million Canadians without access to medications get the access they need.

The program would be analogous to the federal dental care benefit, which addresses gaps for middle and low-income Canadians who don't have either public or private coverage.

For more information, visit www.oda.ca/visiting-the-dentist/government-dental-programs/canadian-dental-care-plan/

This model has several benefits over the single-payer pharmacare model:

- Doesn't disrupt medication coverage for the 27 million Canadians covered by an employer-sponsored plan.^{2,3,4}
- Won't see Canadians lose access to drugs they currently have coverage for, since employer-sponsored plans cover more medicines than public plans.⁵
- Is more affordable for tax payers as it avoids them funding the \$13.4 billion in claims costs – not to mention administration costs and significant technology investments – paid by the private sector.⁶
- Shared drug procurement across public and private sectors to lower drug costs can still be implemented.⁷

GreenShield Cares' Essential Medicines Program Overview:

GreenShield Cares' Essential Medicines program works in synergy with existing public and private prescription drug programs to ensure everyone has access to the drugs they require. It provides eligible patients coverage of up to \$1,000 for drugs included in GreenShield's approved essential medicines list and are dispensed and delivered by GreenShield Health's digital pharmacy.

GreenShield's essential medicines list was developed by members of GreenShield's Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee and was informed by the World Health Organization's model list of essential medicines. The list includes drugs that meet the priority healthcare needs of a population and were selected based on evidence for clinical efficacy, safety, and cost-effectiveness.

The pilot program has started in Ontario, in partnership with select community health centres. It has been thoughtfully designed as a scalable model that can rapidly expand with government support.

The following individuals qualify for the GreenShield Cares program:

- A resident of Ontario
- Currently employed
- Aged 25 to 64
- Have an income below Statistics Canada Low-Income Measure (LIM)
- Require prescription medications to treat a diagnosed medical condition
- Not enrolled in any private or employee drug plan
- Not enrolled in an Ontario public drug program, with the exception of the Trillium Drug Program



About Essential Medicines

For more information, visit greenshieldcares.ca or reach out to our Essential Medicines Program Specialist at essentialmedicines@greenshield.ca.

¹ In 2022, over 36.8 million Canadians (97.2% of the population) were eligible for some form of prescription drug coverage. *The Conference Board of Canada, 2022.*

² In 2021, 27 million Canadians had supplementary health benefits. *Canadian Life & Health Insurance Facts: 2022 Edition.*

³ While 95% of Canadians support a plan for government and insurance companies to work together to ensure affordable access to common prescription drug coverage for all, only 48% are supportive if the program

covers fewer drugs than their current plans. *Abacus Data, Canadians' Views Surrounding Pharmacare, 2020.*

⁴ 65% of Canadians prefer a pharmacare approach that targets those that do not currently have access to drug coverage, over a plan that covers prescription costs for all but might result in a loss of benefits currently covered by employer benefit plans. *Abacus Data, Health Care and Canadian Public Opinion, 2023.*

⁵ Over 7 million Canadians would lose access to a drug they are currently covered for

if moved to public formularies. *CLHIA Submission to Advisory Council on National Pharmacare, 2018.*

⁶ In 2021, Canada's insurers paid \$13.4 billion in supplementary drug benefits. *Canadian Life & Health Insurance Facts: 2022 Edition.*

⁷ The private sector has long requested to join the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance (pCPA) and has expressed an openness to a 'single buyer' model for drug procurement that would achieve the same costs savings contemplated under the single payer model.