

National pharmacare is not in the cards – too expensive, politically unlikely – New expert report

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CALGARY- The proposal for a publicly funded pharmaceutical coverage plan is making the rounds again in Canada. Canada is the only member country of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with a public health-care system that does not include coverage for pharmaceuticals. Advocates for an expansion of the Medicare system to include prescription medication note that it has become common for some lower-income Canadians who lack private drug insurance to leave prescriptions unfilled due to the cost, or miss doses. This affordability problem for lower-income Canadians appears to be getting more serious.

However, a new report from The School of Public Policy and authors Owen Adams and Jordyn Smith, says that despite the best intentions of proponents, national pharmacare is not in the cards anytime soon.

“Perhaps the biggest obstacle for champions of Pharmacare, is that the term can mean so many different things to different people. There is virtually no consensus on what would even be the appropriate Canadian system, particularly in light of how significant a factor private coverage already is in Canada. The matter of how much each level of government, provincial/territorial or federal, would be responsible for funding drugs is a whole other, rather thorny matter,” said Adams.

The author notes that despite a vigorous debate, pharmacare is low on the list of changes Canada’s want to see in the health care system. The sheer complexity of even defining what a national pharmacare program would look like or what and who it would cover undermines its feasibility. Costs would be very high at a time where the feds and provinces are running massive deficits. And, the fact that the federal government is now negotiating health funding deals with provinces individually, makes the application of any national health initiative a major challenge.

Is pharmacare a possibility according to the author? Perhaps. But not now.

The report can be found online at www.policyschool.ca/publications/

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