



Benefits Update: National Universal Pharmacare

The Federal Minister of Health, Mark Holland, introduced Bill-C-64, *An Act respecting pharmacare (Pharmacare Act)* on February 29, 2024. The Act outlines the first phase of a national universal pharmacare program in Canada, including the Government's intention to work with the provinces and territories to provide universal, single-payer coverage for some contraception and diabetes medications including a fund to support coverage of diabetic supplies (i.e. syringes, glucose test strips, etc.). The Bill also provides that the newly created Canadian Drug Agency will work towards the development of a national drug formulary, a national drug bulk purchasing strategy, and the publication of a pan-Canadian strategy regarding the appropriate use of prescription medications.

Details of the exact drugs covered and how the program will be integrated with existing provincial and private (employer) plans were not outlined. Many Canadians are already covered for contraceptives and diabetes medications through provincial or private plans and it is unclear as to how the universal coverage will be coordinated with existing plans.

Until more details of the Universal Pharmacare program are released, it is not possible to assess the impact on existing employer funded extended health plans. The economic impact to individuals and employers will depend on what drug coverage is provided, if coverage is income-based, which provinces participate in the program, and how coverage is coordinated with the provinces.

The full announcement may be accessed at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/news/2024/02/government-of-canada-introduces-legislation-for-first-phase-of-national-universal-pharmacar.html>