



**The Right Drugs, at the Right Times, for the Right Prices:
Toward a Prescription Drug Policy for Canada**

CMA Presentation to House of Commons Standing
Committee on Health

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year, three hundred million prescriptions – about 10 for every man, woman and child – are filled in Canada. Prescription drugs have benefited both the health of Canadians, and the health care system itself; they have meant dramatically improved quality of life for many Canadians, and have saved the country a great deal in hospitalization, social benefits and other expenses. However, it could be questioned whether all of Canada’s prescription drug use is appropriate; patients may be receiving too few medications, too many medications or suboptimal medications for their conditions. In addition, prescription drugs carry a price tag of their own. Since 1975, expenditures on prescription medication have risen faster than any other category in the health sector in Canada, and more is now spent on prescription drugs than on physician services.

Governments, health care providers, drug manufacturers and the public must constantly strive to ensure that Canadians receive optimal and appropriate prescription drug therapy: the right drugs, at the right times, for the right prices.

A considered, coherent, comprehensive, “made in Canada” approach to prescription drug policy should:

- Put the health of the patient first;
- Promote and enhance quality prescribing;
- Respect, sustain and enhance the therapeutic relationship between patients and health professionals;
- Promote patient compliance with drug therapy;
- Respect the principles of patient confidentiality and the privacy of patient and prescriber information.

Prescription drug policy in Canada should address:

Access: to

- efficacious new drugs within an appropriate time;
- coverage for medically necessary drugs for catastrophic care;
- generic drugs at reasonable prices;

- a patient/physician consultation as part of the prescribing process;
- continued research and development capacity in Canada.

Information for health care providers and the public that is balanced and accurate.

Safety: through mechanisms for the systematic monitoring of prescription drugs and their effects.

Canada's doctors are committed to working with others to ensure that Canadians receive the right drugs, at the right times, for the right prices.

Summary of CMA Recommendations:

1. That the federal government implement a timely and efficient drug review process to reduce review times to a level at or better than that in other OECD countries.
2. That the pharmaceutical industry give priority to research and development on drugs and delivery mechanisms that demonstrate a substantial improvement over products already on the market.
3. That Health Canada apply a priority review process to all drugs that demonstrate a substantial improvement over products already on the market.
4. That governments and insurance providers conduct research to identify the current gaps in prescription drug coverage for all Canadians, and develop policy options for providing this coverage, including consideration of the roles of public and private payers.
5. That the federal government monitor and, if necessary, regulate the export of prescription medications to ensure their continued availability to Canadians.
6. That prescribing of medication be done within the context of the therapeutic relationship which exists between the patient and the physician.
7. That brand-specific direct to consumer prescription drug advertising (DTCA) not be permitted in Canada.
8. That the federal government enforce the existing restrictions on DTCA found in the Food and Drug Act to the full extent of the law.
9. That the federal government develop and fund a comprehensive program to provide accurate, unbiased prescription drug information to patients.
10. That all stakeholders join in supporting and encouraging outcome-based research to ascertain best practices in prescribing.
11. That government accelerate activities to establish the Patient Safety Institute using a systems approach to support a culture of safety.
12. That a post-marketing surveillance system be implemented to monitor the ongoing safety of marketed drugs.