

THE VANCOUVER SUN



vancouver 2010
OFFICIAL SUPPLIER

A DIVISION OF CANWEST PUBLISHING INC.

BREAKING NEWS | VANCOUVER.SUN.COM

THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2009 | FINAL EDITION

Prescription for a healthy economy: Finish Pharmacare reform

BY CHERYL KOEHN

Although the economy has been the central issue during this provincial election campaign, the issues of health care delivery and access to medicines remain key factors in deciding which party to support.

The Better Pharmacare Coalition (BPC) realizes there are no easy answers or quick fixes to the complex challenges facing British Columbia's health care system. Throwing new money at an old problem is not the right solution for British Columbians.

The BPC represents provincial and national health organizations and consumer groups with a mandate to speak on behalf of two million British Columbia citizens who need help paying for medically necessary prescription medications — medications that keep them breathing, walking, and living and en-

able them to get back to work, contributing to our provincial economy, not costing it money.

Our goal is to identify and strengthen patient care and choice, ensuring B.C. is a leader in providing the right medication, at the right time, for the right patient. That is why the BPC welcomed the April 2008 decision by government to accept the recommendations of the committee known as the Pharmaceutical Task Force to improve B.C. Pharmacare coverage.

During this provincial election, the BPC has asked for the commitment from the B.C. Liberal party and the New Democratic Party to complete the Pharmacare reform process and the full implementation of the pharmaceutical committee's recommendations, if elected to serve as the next government in B.C.

The focus of those recommendations is to increase access to new, effective medicines and technologies; reduce the

cost of high-priced generic drugs; provide greater control and choice for patients, and create a more transparent drug review and approval process with robust public participation.

Fully implementing the recommendations would significantly improve the health of British Columbians living with serious illnesses and chronic diseases. Just as importantly, at this time of cost pressures on the B.C. health care system, the committee has made concrete and achievable recommendations to reform the province's pharmaceutical processes to ensure government gets the best possible value for taxpayers' dollars, potentially saving millions in direct and indirect health care costs.

To put it in perspective, the Pharmacare budget has increased by more than 50 per cent since 2001, from \$654 million to more than \$1 billion today. Now 300,000 more families receive support than under the old Pharmacare pro-

gram in 2001. More than 23 million prescriptions are now covered each year under Pharmacare. But there is still much work to be done. And what our political leaders must recognize is that completing the reform of the B.C. Pharmacare process is vital to ensuring the sustainable health of our provincial economy.

The consultation process that has occurred to date since the release of the pharmaceutical committee's recommendations has been marked by open, transparent dialogue among stakeholder groups and between stakeholders and the committee implementation team. This process has moved forward positively and constructively to a point today where a majority of health stakeholders are aligned and are reaching consensus on key issues around the reform of Pharmacare.

Over the past 12 months, government has worked with stakeholder groups —

like the BPC — to ensure that the view needs and priorities of those most affected by pharmaceutical management issues in the province are fully considered in the development of a reformed Pharmacare review process.

As election day nears, what B.C. voters need to know is which party is committed to the implementation of the pharmaceutical committee's recommendations.

The Better Pharmacare Coalition urges the political parties to show leadership and make improving B.C. drug policy a top priority in this election.

In the voting booth, we urge voters to think about health care and Pharmacare. Then vote for the party that best represents these vital interests for those who depend on Pharmacare the most — our most vulnerable citizens.

Cheryl Koehn is chair of the Better Pharmacare Coalition.