

# Canada urged to introduce universal drug plan

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An advisory council appointed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Wednesday recommended introducing a national drug program to curtail soaring costs and help millions who cannot afford their prescriptions.

The proposal for universal coverage of prescription drugs to replace a patchwork of private and provincial plans is expected to be a hot-button issue in the October federal election.

Trudeau's Liberals and the New Democrats have already come out in favor of it, while the Conservatives said it would be too costly and are instead touting filling in gaps in private insurance coverage.

The panel said a first step could see the establishment of a Canadian drug agency that would develop a formulary of common and [essential medicines](#) next year, and expand that to a comprehensive plan by 2027.

"Once implemented, pharmacare's stronger negotiating power, lower administrative costs, as well as other improvements will save taxpayers an estimated Can\$5 billion annually," it said in a statement.

Households would each save Can\$350 per year, while businesses that provide [drug](#) coverage would save over Can\$750 annually per employee, it said.

"This is our generation's national project: better access to the medicines we need, improved health outcomes and a fairer and more sustainable

prescription [medicine](#) system," chair of the advisory council, Eric Hoskins, told a press conference.

It would, he added, "complete the unfinished business of universal health care" which was rolled out in 1968.

Canada is the only country with universal health care that does not also provide universal [coverage](#) for prescription drugs.

According to government figures, Canadians spent Can\$34 billion (US\$26 billion) on prescription medicines in 2018. On a per capita basis, only the United States and Switzerland spend more on medicines.

The advisory council found that one in five Canadians struggle to pay for their [prescriptions](#).

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