

The pharmacare plan: united premiers urge the feds to drug the nation

BY PETER WOODFORD



GOVT & MEDICINE

During their annual powwow, all of Canada's premiers agreed (that's right, agreed) on a plan for a national prescription drug insurance plan. All the provinces (except Quebec) would

cede some of their jealously guarded healthcare turf and let the feds administer the nationwide pharmacare program. But there's a rather sizable catch: Ottawa would have to foot the whole bill. So far, the feds' reaction has been cool. Based on

what the players are saying you can decide if Paul Martin's Liberals are looking a gift horse in the mouth or are being justly wary of premiers bearing 'gifts.' [NRM](#)

Big wig	What he's got to say about the pharmacare plan
Gordon Campbell BC Premier 	Soundbite: "It's something that I've been talking about with my staff for some time." Tidbit: Mr Campbell is responsible for putting the national pharmacare issue on the table.
Ralph Klein AB Premier 	Soundbite: The pharmacare plan "is a stroke of brilliance... For the first time, we're giving the federal government the opportunity to participate in the direct delivery of the healthcare system... If they want to get in, this is an opportunity."
Lorne Calvert SK Premier 	Soundbite: After the premiers' successful negotiations, Mr Calvert mused: "It's not every day that the premier of Saskatchewan, the premier of Alberta, on matters of healthcare are 100 per cent in agreement, but today we are."
Gary Doer MB Premier 	Soundbite: The pharmacare plan "is not only visionary, it's also very sensible." Tidbit: Mr Doer reportedly worked hardest to get the premiers' deal done during the Council of the Federation.
Dalton McGuinty ON Premier 	Soundbite: Federal funded drug insurance "would free up the provinces to devote themselves more fully to reducing wait times. We are pulled in all directions within healthcare itself and that would give us the flexibility to attack wait times."

Big wig	What he's got to say about the pharmacare plan
Jean Charest QC Premier 	Soundbite: "We expect to be fully compensated for the program that we have." Tidbit: Quebec already has a public pharmacare program but Mr Charest anticipates extra money from Ottawa if the premiers' plan happens.
Pat Binns PEI Premier 	Soundbite: "We've been saying all along that healthcare is very expensive and that Ottawa should be paying more. If he (the PM) finds that covering 5% is very expensive then he should understand covering the other 95%, that it is an even bigger challenge." Tidbit: For Mr Binns, pharmcare would make up just 1/20th of the total cost of healthcare.
Danny Williams NF Premier 	Soundbite: The plan "is a win-win for everybody and a huge win for Canadians."
Bernard Lord NB Premier 	Soundbite: "Maybe the best way is to give it all to the federal government and say, 'you take it. We'll help you deliver it, you take it, you fund it, you set the criteria.'" Tidbit: Mr Lord sees the plan as a way to forgo the traditional federal/provincial skirmishing on healthcare.
John Hamm NS Premier 	Soundbite: "We would use [any healthcare savings brought on by pharmacare] to achieve all the objectives that we've set for ourselves in Your Health Matters [the NS government's healthcare reinvestment plan]." Tidbit: Dr Hamm is Canada's only physician premier.

What the Feds say...



Paul Martin
Prime Minister

Soundbite: "I think that's where the focus has to lie."

Tidbit: Mr Martin has been diverting questions about the premiers' plan to back his smaller scale 'catastrophic cost insurance' pet project.



Ujjal Dosanjh
Federal Health Minister

Soundbite: At his speech during the recent CMA annual meeting he said: "an effective pharmacare initiative cannot stand alone or exist in isolation from other elements of healthcare."

Tidbit: Given his provincial NDP roots, one would think Mr Dosanjh could be expected to support a national pharmacare plan.



Ralph Goodale
Federal Finance Minister

Soundbite: "It would be very difficult to see how the premiers' proposal could be accomplished within the known fiscal framework... \$12.5 billion per year is a prohibitive amount for the federal treasury to be able to consider at the present time."

Tidbit: Mr Goodale is the most forceful public opponent of the pharmacare plan.