

Open letter to federal and provincial ministers of health

November 6, 2022

Subject: Addressing health system challenges through better access to cancer medicines

Dear ministers,

Several years into the COVID-19 pandemic, health systems across Canada continue to face immense pressures.

Demand for health services is outstripping capacity as cancer care and treatment have been delayed, cancelled, or otherwise affected by the pandemic.

As all health ministries struggle with these challenges, continued collaboration and dialogue between all health care stakeholders on potential solutions will be key.

In this context, on behalf of CanCertainty – a coalition comprised of over 30 patient organizations, cancer health charities, and caregiver organizations, all focused on attaining optimal patient access to cancer treatments across Canada – we would like to stress that medicines are a key tool that can help us address these resource challenges by reducing demand for health services.

Research has shown that every dollar spent on medications results in two dollars of offsetting health and societal benefits, as medicines help keep patients healthy, productive, and out of hospital.¹

However, Canadians are waiting longer and longer to obtain access to new medicines. While Health Canada and both of Canada's health technology assessment (HTA) bodies (CADTH and INESSS) have implemented measures to help accelerate regulatory and HTA reviews for innovative products, there remain several challenges within the HTA process, the negotiation process with the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance (pCPA) and subsequent provincial reimbursement. These challenges ultimately result in delayed and more limited patient access to new medicines.

According to 2022 research from IQVIA, less than half of the new drugs available globally are launched in Canada. Moreover, public drug plans cover fewer than one in five of these drugs and take over three and a half years, on average, from global launch to public reimbursement, placing us 18th out of 20 other OECD countries.

¹ Hermus G, Stonebridge C et al, Reducing the Health Care and Societal Costs of Disease: The Role of Pharmaceuticals, Conference Board of Canada, 2013.

These delays in access to medicines have negative impacts on patients and their health outcomes. A recent study showed that a one-month delay in cancer treatment can have a significant impact on a person's mortality. Patients were found to have a 6-13% higher risk of dying if their treatment was delayed by a month.² Another study demonstrated that funding delays lead to a very large number of potential life-years lost.³ Naturally, these delays in access also lead to increased use of health system resources.

Moving forward, we should aim to improve Canada's time to funded access to ensure that it moves closer to that of other developed countries. For this to happen, we should establish clearer and more ambitious targets for public reimbursement of cancer medicines (e.g., within 6 months from Health Canada approval).

Addressing these challenges should be among your top priorities as you assemble for the Health Ministers meeting in Vancouver.

We will be reaching out to you and your government representatives in the coming weeks to further elaborate on these important points.

Sincerely,



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² Journal of Clinical Oncology. Comparison between Canadian and British oncology drug review recommendations and their impact on patient access. May 30, 2017:
https://ascopubs.org/doi/abs/10.1200/JCO.2017.35.15_suppl.6537

³ Potential Life-Years Lost: The Impact of the Cancer Drug Regulatory and Funding Process in Canada, The Oncologist, 2020