

## Letter Writing Campaign

Below are examples of letters we have received from Canadians across the country who have written to their government representatives telling them how the lack of access to prescription medication has impacted their lives.

“I currently work in both fitness and health care facilities. I see first-hand the challenges that Canadians face with access to life changing medication and how it negatively impacts their daily life. I’ve met individuals who put themselves at risk before undergoing physical activity, the only reason being they cannot afford their asthma medication to complement a healthy lifestyle. No Canadian should have to question whether they can afford or access medication that allows them to live a normal life.”

– From Calgary, AB

“I have severe eosinophilic asthma, which is a rare form and yet there are multiple medications offered and I can’t access since it’s not funded and my insurance is not high enough to cover it.

My husband works hard to provide for us, and I have three wonderful kids that need their mom to be active and participating in their lives. I get hospitalized a lot and the price of the medication per year is cheaper than my two-week hospital admission.

All Canadians should have equitable and timely access to prescription medications based on the best possible health outcomes rather than the ability to pay. Thoughtful consideration and leadership from all levels of government is needed to eliminate all gaps in drug coverage. I trust you will agree with me on that.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you regarding this issue.”

– From Langley, BC

“I was diagnosed with asthma during my early childhood years. Since then, I have seen multiple specialists and trialed numerous medications to manage my asthma. As a teen, I dropped out of team sports and band because I could not breathe. I know the importance of taking care of my lung health. I get my flu shot annually, I avoid allergens, and I see my doctor regularly to manage my asthma. I started taking Singulair when I was 17 years old in conjunction with my ventolin and the various controller inhalers I have tried over the years. My asthma has been well controlled since I started taking Singulair. When I began working full time, my insurance changed and my drug plan was limited. I receive coverage for up to \$600/year (per household) for my medications through Manitoba Blue Cross. I have two different strengths of my inhaler: the stronger dose I take during allergy season and when I am sick, and the lower dose I take throughout the rest of the year.

Because of the cost of my medications, I run out of coverage during the first quarter of every year. This past year, I decided to switch to generic Singulair to decrease the annual expense of my medications. I switched to generic Singulair in October 2017. Since then, I have had two lung infections, two colds and two asthma attacks requiring treatment by prednisone. I missed ten workdays in a three-month period because of my asthma. Prior to this, I had one lung infection in a two-year period. Clearly the generic medication did not work as effectively for me as the brand name product. I decided to join my husband's plan through to increase my drug plan coverage. However, that plan will only cover generic medications when there is a generic alternative available to the brand name. Thus, even though I am paying for two drug plans, I still have to pay \$286 for a three-month supply of Singulair. Further, because I have been so sick, my Manitoba Blue Cross coverage ran out in the third month of the year. If I had continued taking the brand name Singulair, perhaps there would not have been a need for me to take oral steroids, antibiotics or trial new inhalers. My only option is to pay out of pocket for the medication. I choose to continue to take on the financial strain to manage my chronic illness. But being able to breathe clearly should not come at this price for someone who has universal healthcare and two drug plans. It should not come at this price for any Canadian.

There are many Canadians suffering with asthma who might decide to stop taking their medications as the expense of the medication is too much of a burden for them to take on financially. However, this decision only further harms the Canadian economy and plugs up our health care system. People with uncontrolled asthma show up in our emergency rooms and require costly inpatient treatment, or they die. Manitoba is the only province in Canada that does not have an assistance program in place to cover the difference in cost of Singlair and an available generic product. I am advocating that Manitoba be added to the list of provinces that receive assistance to pay for brand name Singulair and that better coverage options become available to Canadians with asthma. Canadians with asthma should not have to pay such a high price so that they can control their asthma symptoms. Thoughtful consideration and leadership from all levels of government is needed to eliminate all gaps in drug coverage. I trust you will agree with me on that."

– From Winnipeg, MB

"If it were not for OHIP+ that started in January 2018, there would be many times that I would have not been able to afford my life-saving asthma medications. Every month my asthma medications cost \$200. Living in Canada, I and many others should NOT have to decide between putting food on the table and medications that we need. If people with asthma don't have access to needed medications, there's a high possibility that they would end up in hospital. If all Canadians have access to free or reduced cost medications, than healthcare spending may be reduced overall."

– From Stratford, ON

"I have severe Asthma and my medication is quite expensive. I worry about the cost once I retire and lose my health care insurance. Please work towards a universal prescription medication plan."

– From Regina, SK

“Like all countries with national healthcare systems, Canadians should have access to medicines under their provincial plans or perhaps a future national plan for pharmacare.

I urge you to help support this initiative not just on behalf of the millions of Canadians living with asthma and their caregivers but all Canadians living with chronic and severe illnesses without access to plan-covered drugs.”

– From North York, ON

“I was fortunate enough to use my school insurance, and then work insurance to cover most of the costs of my prescription medication for my asthma and allergies. However, when I was unable to access my work insurance, I was left to ask my physician for samples to get by. They could only help so much, and I couldn't afford to replace all my puffers and asthma control medications. One puffer, up front, would have cost me \$200. Multiply that by 3, add my nasal spray, prescription allergy pills, and my asthma controller pills, I would have been out close to \$1000. Because I thought I was healthy enough, I went without replacing all my medications. Over time, my health deteriorated and I would have horrible fits of asthma during seasonal changes. It would affect my ability to go out, exercise, or work.

My parents have a habit of storing medications from the physicians in our fridge. They think it'll preserve it for the days when they are unable to access work insurance. But the problem with that is that they skimmed on using their medication on a daily basis, which didn't help their health. When it came time to use the medications, because it was in storage for so long, the effect of the medication wasn't as strong either. I want to erase their fear of being unable to afford the medication we need.”

– From Richmond Hill, ON