

Statement of Principles

Why are cancer drugs essential and why should they be provided to all Canadians who need them?

Cancer can be a life-threatening disease that requires immediate treatment. As drugs are becoming increasingly important to prolong life and relieve suffering, it is crucial that they be provided in a timely manner to all Canadians who need them. Perhaps in no other area of medicine are Canadians' expectations for publicly funded care so high.

However, cancer patients who require medications are often in situations where they are least likely to afford them due to other concomitant factors, such as loss of employment and additional medical expenses. Although it shares many features of other diseases that equally merit limits on financial expenditures, cancer is a unique challenge due to its prevalence and acute diagnosis, as well as the inconsistent approaches to managing the disease across health systems in Canada.

What principles should guide the path forward and how will they add value to the symposium?

To define the key elements of cancer drug access, a set of principles has been outlined below. Solutions to the specific issue of limiting patients' out-of-pocket costs must satisfy all of the principles, which will serve as a framework for engaging stakeholders, anchoring discussions, and supporting ongoing efforts, including the preparation of Health Accord proposals.

Key Principles for Discussion:

1. **All Canadians must have equitable access to cancer drugs throughout their lifetime.**
 - An income-based or dollar limit should be placed on out-of-pocket expenses to prevent any detrimental impact on health, financial and social outcomes for patients and their families. (The Canadian Cancer Society proposes a limit of 3% of net household income.)
 - Canadians should be covered through a mix of private and public insurance systems that are coordinated to ensure seamless cancer drug coverage throughout their lives.
 - Affordable coverage for cancer drugs should be available to all Canadians regardless of their place of residence, income, age, and/or health status.

2. **All Canadians must have access to the range of cancer drugs available in other comparable countries through transparent and efficient approval processes.**
 - While Canada is in an economic position to provide a range of cancer medications and service delivery models, it currently ranks number 13 out of 14 comparable OECD countries in the utilization of cancer drugs.
 - Canadians should have access to at least the range of medications available to residents of other G-8 countries with comparable government-run health systems.
 - Universal coverage and limiting the financial risk of patients should not be accomplished at the expense of providing a desirable range of cancer drugs and supporting future access to valuable new treatments.
 - In addition to being transparent and efficient, drug approval processes should take into consideration rare forms of cancer and apply consistent standards across the country, as is seen with the pan-Canadian Oncology Drug Review.

3. Costs of cancer drugs are a shared responsibility.

Cost must be shared equitably among the following entities:

- Governments:
 - Governments are responsible for applying the principles of social justice to ensure that all Canadians are adequately covered and to determine how costs can be shared equitably.
 - Governments should continue to work with other stakeholders to support innovation, including investments in product development and advances in care delivery.
- Individuals:
 - Patients may be required to contribute to costs either proactively (through insurance premiums) or through user fees (deductibles, co-payments).
 - Employers could voluntarily decide to cover the costs of cancer drugs for their employees.
- Manufacturers:
 - Manufacturers of cancer drugs are expected to show transparency in how their prices are set, while providing a fair return on their costs of discovery and development.
 - Out of compassion, manufacturers could voluntarily decide to reduce the price of their medications on a limited basis.

These principles are interlinked; one cannot be ignored without impact on the others, as the diagram below expresses.

