

GREEN PARTY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

COMMENTARY ON GOVERNMENT'S DISCUSSION PAPER

"FAIR DRUG PRICES FOR NEW BRUNSWICKERS"

The Green Party lauds the government for this first step in an attempt to stem the runaway and unsustainable cost of prescription drugs in New Brunswick. The party is concerned, however, that there is not a more comprehensive approach to the issue.

There is ample evidence that three factors combine to influence the cost of prescription drug programs:

1. The health status of the people of the province determines the need that they have to benefit from prescription drugs;
2. Prescribing practices of physicians determines actual use, which often goes beyond what is beneficial and exceeds need;
3. Prescription drug prices paid by prescription drug plans and individuals that often substantially exceed the cost of production plus reasonable profit due to massive spending on marketing."

New Brunswick's governments have done relatively little to reduce need or non-beneficial use. Such a broader focus is long overdue. During the recent election campaign the Green Party's platform included several proposals aimed at improving population health to reduce need and encouraging better prescribing practices by physicians. The new Progressive Conservative government has yet to act on these or similar initiatives.

Generic drug price management is a straightforward and quite simple initiative. Many other provinces are well ahead of New Brunswick in this area. Our relatively small size gives us no influence over prices, but we should address this weakness by linking ourselves to the purchasing power of the larger provinces. We need only to take Quebec's "Most Favoured Nation" approach to obtain the best available prices for prescription drugs in Canada. By following the same approach, appropriate legislation in New Brunswick would ensure that we obtain the best price available in any province or territory. Most often, the best price will be found in Ontario through the "Drug System Renewal Program". Generic drug prices in Ontario are set at 25 percent of the price of the equivalent brand name product.

The Green Party of New Brunswick urges quick resolution of the drug pricing issue so that attention is directed to reducing the use of prescription drugs. Initiatives in the area of population health status

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improvement and appropriate physicians' prescribing practices would have the greatest impact on the total cost of prescription drugs in New Brunswick. The cheapest drug is the one you don't use.