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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

## **ONDP Pharmacare Plan: A Welcome Step Toward Comprehensive Drug Coverage for All**

Toronto – The Ontario Health Coalition welcomes the Ontario NDP’s announcement today of a proposed drug program to expand coverage to 2.2 million Ontarians. Just as public health care, or “medicare”, covers hospitals and doctors, public pharmacare would be a public insurance program covering medicines. It would improve the current patchwork of private insurance plans, the Ontario Drug Benefits program and the Trillium Drug Plan.

The ONDP plan is a welcome first step towards the ultimate goal of a comprehensive national public pharmacare program for all Canadians. The coalition strongly supports that the ONDP’s plan is universal, meaning that all Ontarians would be covered. The ONDP proposal would cover a list of 125 “essential” medications by 2020. This varies from the Health Coalition’s policy which advocates for a comprehensive program – covering all needed drugs and leaving no one in medical need uncovered. The coalition looks forward to having some dialogue with the NDP about the principles and scope of the program that they are proposing.

Ontario’s Liberal government, too, has advocated for the federal government to make a priority of pharmacare. The Trudeau government has not responded favourably, despite the work of Ontario’s government, and despite a motion passed at the federal Liberal convention last May advocating a universal public drug program as a priority. In addition, the Trudeau government has abrogated its commitment to renew a National Health Accord and has forced through side deals that reduce the federal share of funding for the existing public health care program.

“Almost 1 in 10 Ontarians do not fill their prescriptions because of cost. Ontarians with cancer, HIV, Crohn’s disease, arthritis and a host of other illnesses face high costs for drugs and inadequate coverage,” noted Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “The NDP’s promotion of a public drug program will help to highlight the hardship and suffering that are a result of the gaps in private and government drug coverage programs today.”

“We hope that the ONDP’s announcement will be a first step in expanding the principles of the Canada Health Act to provide comprehensive public insurance for needed medicines for all Canadians,” she concluded.

Any pharmacare program must deal with drug pricing and safety. Evidence from the Canadian Institute for Health Information shows that Canadians pay the second highest prices in the world for drugs.

“We look forward to hearing some more details on this proposal,” added Adrienne Silnicki, national coordinator of the Canadian Health Coalition. “Drug safety is a priority issue for us, as are user fees including co-payments and deductibles for patients. We welcome the Ontario NDP’s announcement as a means of furthering the national discussion on a comprehensive public drug program for all.”

For background information on Ontarians and access to needed medications, see the Ontario Health Coalition’s Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Trade:  
<http://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/index.php/submission-speaking-out-about-protecting-health-care-from-international-trade-agreements/>