

OTTAWA NEEDS TO GET PHARMACARE RIGHT THIS TIME

It can look a little tattered around the edges, but Canadians routinely and fiercely defend their universal, publicly funded health care system.

Just look at the outrage generated over the possibility that the restructuring of Ontario's health care system by Doug Ford will open the door to more private delivery of medical services.

And yet there's a glaring gap in our medicare system that gets far too little attention: the lack of universal access to prescription drugs.

The Royal Commission on Health Services that created Canada's public system saw the need for a national pharmacare program all the way back in the 1960s. But politics got in the way and Canadians have paid a high price ever since.

That price is paid with too many people sicker than they need to be because they can't afford to pay for their prescriptions, and actual dollars - billions annually - through unnecessarily high drug prices.

Now, years after two royal commissions, a national forum and too many reports to count, the federal government has indicated it's finally ready to move in its March 19 budget. That's welcome and overdue.

But it's worrisome that Finance Minister Bill Morneau has also suggested the government is planning to fill the gaps rather than deliver a universal medicare-style plan. If that's the case, it will be a real missed opportunity.

Certainly it's easy to see the political appeal of a plan that simply seeks to patch up the holes between workplace private insurance plans, federal programs and provincial/territorial benefits, largely targeted to children, seniors and the poor.

But it's worth the effort to finally get this right. The benefits of a robust national pharmacare plan are substantial, both in improving health outcomes for millions of Canadians and reducing overall costs. The further off that ideal the government goes, the fewer of those benefits we'll see.

Canada spent an astounding \$34 billion on prescribed drugs last year; according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information. Of that, about 40 per cent was publicly financed and the rest covered by private insurance or individuals paying out of pocket. It's not only an enormous sum, it's a far bigger one than it should be. Canadians pay the highest drug prices in the world, but for the United States and Switzerland. There is no good reason for that.

According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, billions could be saved annually through a national pharmacare program, with its bulk buying of drugs and stricter regulations on prices.

Much of those savings, though, would go to individuals and employers, while increased costs would be transferred to the public purse. The challenge of figuring out a fair and feasible way to address that is what has kept all those reports calling for pharmacare sitting on shelves, collecting dust.

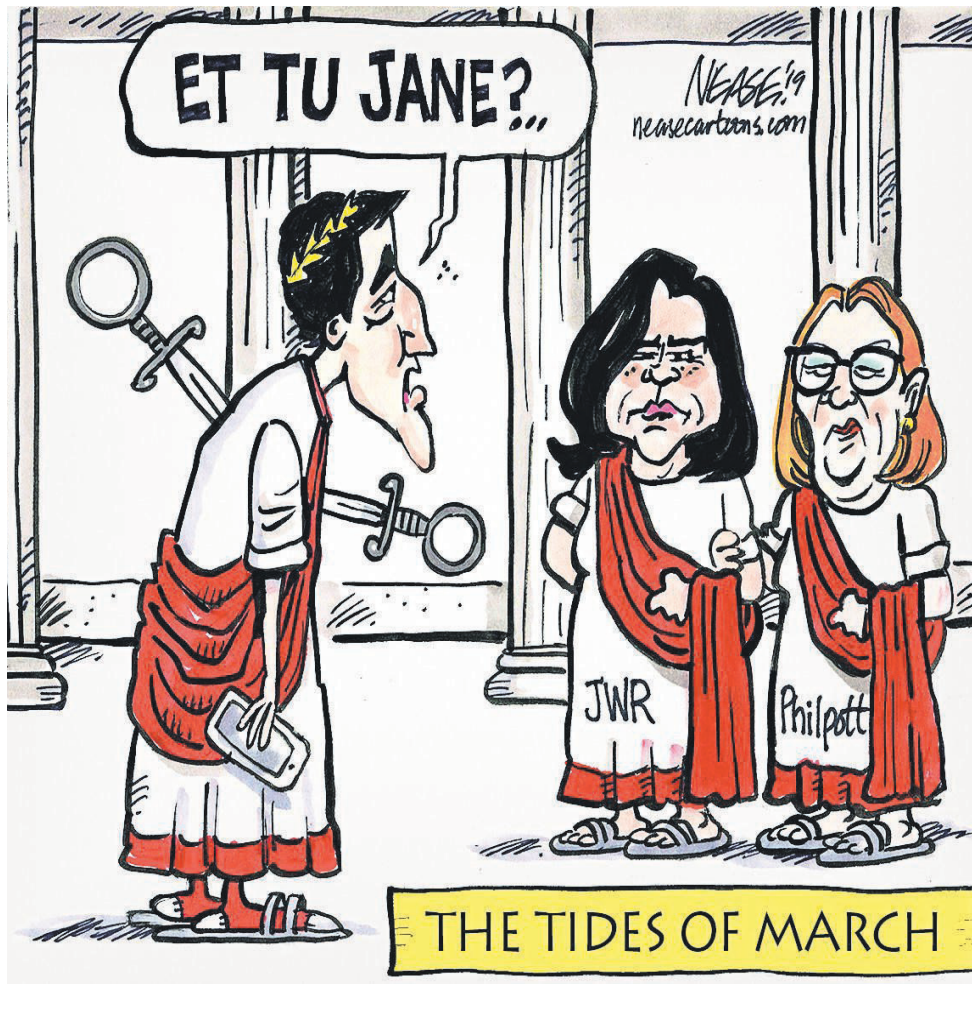
But it's imperative that the government finds a way forward, and soon. Workers already see employers responding to the rapidly rising costs of benefits by diminishing their coverage with increasing co-pays, fees and caps, and reducing drug options.

And those are the people who have workplace benefits. That's increasingly not the case for workers, especially in low-wage fields, who face a never-ending cycle of part-time, contract and temp agency jobs, which provide few if any benefits.

Maintaining this inadequate patchwork costs everyone - governments, individuals and businesses - far more than it should. That's not good for anyone, including those who enjoy good coverage now.

We know Canada's medicare system is less costly and delivers better health than the U.S. public-private mix. It's time the federal government saw pharmacare in that same light.

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THE MARIE KONDO SPOTLIGHT

WHAT TO THINK OF HER REMARKABLE FAME, WRITES STEPHEN ILOTT



STEPHEN ILOTT
Column

I am asked a lot these days what I think of the Japanese home organizer Marie Kondo. With the spotlight on her growing popularity, decluttering, once more, has an advocate for the profession of home organizing.

The exotic filter is via the Japanese perspective and a culture with far less space to house stuff. It is a direction we are all heading and should take heed. Though some of her ideas, such as getting rid of all your books, simply do not fly with my clients, much of what she notes is spot on and a commonality for North American audiences: keep what you love, downsize the ex-

cess and regain control of your rooms by defining by use, etc.

I have been an organizer for 16 years and have done over 1,300 homes. I wrote about the same methods for years, including my book, *The Domestic Archaeologist*.

What I am pleased about is that organizers are once more gaining recognition. It is not just the high-profile organizers we should think about such as Oprah's Peter Walsh or the wonderful Canadian Hellen Buttigieg and her show *Neat*, of a couple of years ago. It is important to give a nod to the thousands of other hard-working and under-the-radar members of the profession giving their all each day. One is a 600-member group is Professional Organizers in Canada (POC). Some also have very fun books worth perusing. I am a proud member of that association and marvel at the almost-insurmountable tasks we all take on, including for hoarders.

Think outside of the box, including addressing your

possessions directly, thanking some and bidding a sad farewell to others, including some with the guilt and memories you've attached to them. It's all cathartic and worth exploring to help with the psychology of letting go.

Approach decluttering as you would a diet: drop what really isn't needed to achieve a new you. Find advice and an organizer you like.

Spark joy - it'll bring a little therapy to your home.

Stephen Ilott is a professional home organizer with decluttering.ca and author of "The Domestic Archaeologist." For more information, visit www.decluttering.ca or contact him at info@decluttering.ca or 416-460-8098.

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