



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

Your Voice for Choice

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

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Trudeau and Health Minister Should Intervene Now to Ensure Coverage of Abortion Drugs

NATIONAL — A national abortion rights group is dismayed and angered by the recent revelation that Canadian women will have to pay \$300 out-of-pocket to use the abortion pill, Mifegymiso, when it finally arrives in pharmacies in the spring. The Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada has asked the Prime Minister's Office to expedite a solution to the crisis, which a [Globe & Mail editorial](#) called a “fresh slap in the face to women.”

“The abortion pill truly is the moral property of women,” said Joyce Arthur, Executive Director of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC). “It’s an essential drug that women need to control their fertility and their lives. Women have a right to it because our Supreme Court ruled in 1988 that arbitrary restrictions on abortion access violate women’s rights under the Charter. We believe some of the onerous restrictions imposed by Health Canada on Mifegymiso – and now the high cost of the drugs for women – amount to gender discrimination and Charter violations of rights – not just against women but also transgender people who can get pregnant.”

Arthur says the most obvious solution to the cost issue is for CADTH to make an exception and waive the fee for Celopharma. (See “[Background](#)” on page 2.) But since that agency seems reluctant, ARCC is calling on Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Health Minister Jane Philpott to act quickly to ensure that women will not have to pay.

“There’s several possible solutions,” said Arthur. “The federal government could order Health Canada to pay for the cost of the drug review for Celopharma. They could also ask the provinces to pay for the drug reviews, like Quebec does. Or, Canada could look to the example of Australia – In 2013, then-Prime Minister Julia Gillard slashed the price of the abortion pill to \$12 for most women. Although Australia has a federal drug program that makes this solution more feasible, Canada really needs to catch up to the rest of the developed world and implement a national Pharmacare program, or at least a national drug formulary that would cover certain drugs for all Canadians.”

Arthur noted that other solutions might be possible too: “The bottom line is that the federal government should be able to find a workaround to fix this problem. We believe the government has an obligation to act, considering the human rights issues at stake, and the fact that abortion is still politicized and stigmatized, which often translates to inadequate access.”

“Trudeau calls himself a feminist and has often expressed strong support for a ‘woman’s right to choose,’ while Health Minister Jane Philpott has promised to improve abortion access,” said Peggy Cooke, a Toronto spokesperson for ARCC. “We’re asking them to step up and do something now. Please take direct action to ensure that Mifegymiso will be covered and accessible to all who need it, especially low income and rural women, youth, and transgender individuals.”

Background:

- Mifegymiso is a drug combination of mifepristone and misoprostol that terminates a pregnancy. It was approved by Health Canada in 2015, but the process took over 3 years.
- The Canadian distributor, Celopharma Inc., says it cannot afford the \$72,000 fee for the “Common Drug Review,” which is a separate process not run by Health Canada. All new drugs must go through this review before provinces can cover the drug in their insurance programs.
- However, the fee for the review was only implemented in 2014, while Celopharma began their drug application to Health Canada in 2011 when these drug reviews were free of charge. (Quebec has its own review process and does not charge a fee.)
- Celopharma had not budgeted for the extra cost and was forced to withdraw from the review process in July. It is a small company that expended considerable resources during the long approval process.
- The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH), which oversees the Common Drug Review, has claimed that they can’t waive the fee or provide a discount or payment plan, because they don’t want to “set a bad precedent.”

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