

FACT SHEET #12



JUST SAY NO TO DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER DRUG ADVERTISING IN CANADA A better choice for retired Canadians

The brand-name pharmaceutical industry continues to lobby the Canadian government to lift the ban on mass-media advertising of prescription drugs under the Food and Drug Act.

The Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) believes that direct-to-consumer advertising will only add to the problem of skyrocketing prescription drug costs in Canada.

In the United States, where direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs has been allowed since 1997, research has shown that there is a strong link between prescription drug usage and advertisements.

In its November 2001 report Prescription Drugs and Mass Media Advertising, 2000, the National Institute for Health Care Management reported the following:

- A relatively small number of prescription drugs that were advertised to the public in 2000 contributed significantly to the increase in pharmaceutical spending in the U.S. from 1999 to 2000.
- Retail sales of the 50 most heavily advertised drugs rose an aggregate 32% from 1999 to 2000, compared to 13.6% for all other drugs combined.

Increases in the sales of the 50 drugs most heavily advertised to consumers in 2000 were responsible for nearly half (47%) of the \$20.8 billion increase in retail spending on prescription drugs from 1999 to 2000. Increases in the sales of all other prescription drugs (numbering about 9,850 in the retail market) accounted for 52.2% of the one-year rise in retail pharmaceutical spending.

The number of prescriptions for the 50 most heavily advertised drugs rose 24.6% from 1999 to 2000, compared to an increase of 4.3% for all other drugs combined.

Not only can direct-to-consumer advertising lead to higher drug costs, it can also lead to more physician visits. In a country like Canada where the vast majority of physicians are paid on a fee-for-service basis, the cost implications of more, and perhaps unnecessary, patient visits to physicians are clear.

Advertising does not provide the impartial, objective information people need to make informed decisions about their health and treatment. Its goal is to increase product sales.

What's more, most often pharmaceutical companies advertise new, more expensive drugs that are not necessarily any safer or more effective than drugs already on the market.

In September 2003, CURC appeared before the House of Commons Health Committee and raised its objections to looser rules for direct-to-consumer advertising by drug companies. In its April 2004 report, the Committee recommended that, "Health Canada immediately enforce the current prohibition on all industry-sponsored advertisements on prescription drugs to the public."

You can make a better choice.

When you vote, choose a party that is clearly opposed to keeping direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs, like they have in the United States, out of Canada.



For more information about the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) and better ideas for health care, visit: <http://curc.clc-ctc.ca>.