

May 19th, 2021

Office of the Minister of Health
Health Canada
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Dear Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health

With the G7 Summit taking place in the next month, we would like to share our perspective on opportunities for Canada to take action in this critical area to help address the growing global public health threat posed by drug-resistant pathogens and antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Globally, antibiotic resistance is estimated to cause at least 700,000 deaths annually. As modern medicine advances, we rely heavily on antibiotics to treat severe and life-threatening infections that complicate procedures such as cancer chemotherapy, transplants, caesarean births, joint replacements, other surgeries, care of wounds and burns, and care of complex patients, including those living with chronic respiratory disease or other underlying conditions. However, in Canada, resistant bacterial infections were responsible for the deaths of over 14,000 people in 2018 (about 1 in 19 deaths).¹ Of these deaths, 5,400 (or almost 15 a day) could be considered directly attributable to AMR itself.² Furthermore, antibiotic resistance impacts our preparedness for public health emergencies, as secondary infections can complicate the response to mass casualty events. The care and treatment of COVID-19 afflicted patients in intensive care units is a current and poignant case in point. Access to new, innovative antibiotics is a critical component of the pandemic preparedness challenges that the G7 partners will address in their meeting this summer.

We applaud past G7 commitments to address AMR and appreciate global gains made as many countries have developed action plans and increased surveillance. But significant work remains, and the G7 must develop actionable strategies that go beyond previous discussions. The U.K. presidency of the G7 in 2021 presents a significant opportunity to advance AMR solutions, noting that Dame Sally Davies, U.K.'s special envoy for antimicrobial resistance, is widely recognized as a leading global voice on the AMR crisis. While Canada is working to finalize the AMR Action Plan, we encourage Canada's active participation in the global dialogue on AMR priorities, particularly around areas that Canada can implement nationally and solve AMR issues globally, such as health technology assessments (HTA).

¹ Council of Canadian Academies. When Antibiotics Fail, pg. 34. <https://cca-reports.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/When-Antibiotics-Fail-1.pdf>

² Council of Canadian Academies. When Antibiotics Fail, pg. 34. <https://cca-reports.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/When-Antibiotics-Fail-1.pdf>

We urge G7 countries to reinforce the importance of well-resourced national action plans and establish metrics that track progress against AMR to inform future G7 action. These metrics should include implementing incentives for antibiotic research and development (R&D)—an aspect of the global AMR response in which little progress has been made. Antibiotics must be used judiciously to preserve their effectiveness, making it exceedingly difficult for antibiotic innovators to earn the reasonable return on investment necessary to sustain the antibiotic pipeline. Nearly all large pharmaceutical companies have been driven away from antibiotic R&D, and small companies in this space struggle to stay in business. Since 2010, only two of the 15 new antibiotics approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration have been introduced in Canada. Federal investments and global cooperation paired with new policies to provide returns on investments are critical to ensure a renewable antibiotic pipeline capable of meeting current and future patient and public health needs. Additionally, we would like to encourage Canada to work with the G7 to address market barriers to making widely available additional therapeutic and prevention options that can mitigate the AMR threat – such as vaccines for infectious disease, new antimicrobials, anti-fungals and the use of antivirals.

The G7 is an essential mechanism through which Canada could encourage broader action on reimbursement reform and novel incentives aligned with policy proposals currently under consideration by governments such as the U.S. Congress. In combination with the 2022 German and the 2023 Japanese G7 presidencies, there is a real opportunity to set and deliver ambitious goals related to antibiotic innovation.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue. Please know that CAIC is here as a resource to you, your department and the government, and we welcome continued engagement on this issue with you or your team.

Sincerely,

Canadian Antimicrobial Innovation Council

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