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CONSUMER ADVERTISING FOR PRESCRIPTION  
MEDICATIONS**

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CURRENTLY ALLOWED IN CANADA**

**SUPPORT FOR DTCA RISES TO 85% WHEN  
SPECIFIC REGULATIONS ARE PROPOSED**



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## **68% OF CANADIANS SUPPORT DIRECT TO CONSUMER ADVERTISING FOR PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS**

### **HALF (53%) ALREADY BELIEVE THAT IT IS CURRENTLY ALLOWED IN CANADA**

### **SUPPORT FOR DTCA RISES TO 85% WHEN SPECIFIC REGULATIONS ARE PROPOSED**

**Toronto, ONT** – A poll released today indicates that seven in ten (68%) Canadians agree that advertising about prescription medications and drugs directly to Canadian consumers should be allowed – 31% disagree. Further, half (53%) already believe that direct to consumer advertising (DTCA) for prescription medications is currently allowed in Canada although it is not. And although half (51%) agree with the Federal Government’s current limits on DTCA for prescription medicines, support for DTCA climbs to 85% when specific regulations on DTCA are proposed. These would require a direct to consumer pharmaceutical advertisement to:

- describe for whom the product is appropriate and inappropriate;
- describe the major side effects;
- include a “consult your physician” tag line;
- provide sources for further third party, unbiased information; and
- be prescreened and approved by an independent regulatory authority appointed by the government.



*These are the findings of an Ipsos-Reid/Alliance For Access to Medical Information survey conducted by telephone between August 9<sup>th</sup> and August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2001. The survey is based on a randomly selected sample of 1,503 adult Canadians. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within  $\pm 2.5$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to the 1996 Census data.*

## ***Pharmacists, Doctors Dominate Information Sources on Rx***

On an open-ended basis, six in ten Canadians mention pharmacists (60%) or doctors (59%) among the sources of information they rely on specifically for prescription medication and drug information. Doctors (40%) are generally the public's first top of mind source for information related to prescription medications, followed by pharmacists (36%). One in ten (10%) Canadians say that they use the Internet or books/library for information about prescription medication and drug information, while roughly the same proportion rely on family and friends (7%) or the media including magazines (4%), newspapers (3%) and TV (4%).

When it comes to sources of information specifically for prescription medications and drugs, respondents from BC (63%) and Quebec (62%) are most reliant on their doctor, compared to the rest of Canada, while respondents from Atlantic Canada (68%) and Saskatchewan/Manitoba (65%) are more likely to rely on pharmacists. Quebecers (65%) are also more likely to rely on pharmacists than other Canadians, especially compared to those from Ontario (57%) and BC (49%).



## ***68% Canadians Support Direct to Consumer Advertising of Prescription Medications***

Seven in ten (68%) Canadians agree that advertising about prescription medications and drugs directly to Canadian consumers should be allowed – 31% disagree.

Although support for DTCA is fairly even across the country, it is slightly higher in Ontario (70%) and Saskatchewan/Manitoba (70%) and lower in Quebec (66%), BC (66%) and Alberta (62%). The intensity of opposition is “harder” in Alberta where 22% “strongly disagree”, compared to BC where 18 percent “strongly disagree and Quebec where just 16 percent “strongly disagree”.

Demographically, there are few significant differences among Canadians on the DTCA issue. Younger Canadians appear to be leaning towards DTCA moreso than those who are older. Just on the cusp of the margin of error, Canadians 18 to 34 (70%) are slightly more likely to agree with DTCA than those 55 or older (64%) with 35 to 54 year olds in middle (69%).

University graduates (60%) are least likely to support DTCA, while those with less than a high school education are most likely (71%), whereas Canadians with a household income of less than \$60k (71%) are more likely to support DTCA than those earning more (63%).

## ***Half (53%) Already Believe That It is Currently Allowed in Canada***

The majority (53%) of Canadians already believe that DTCA for prescription medications or drugs is currently allowed in Canada. A plurality (43%) believe the DTCA is not currently allowed in Canada and 4 percent are unsure.

Regionally, Quebecers (60%) are more likely than other Canadians to believe that DTCA is permitted in Canada, whereas Albertans (40%) are least likely. Canadians who agree that DTCA should be allowed in Canada are more likely than Canadians from other regions to

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believe that it is permitted in Canada already (61% versus 27%). The findings also reveal that eight in ten Canadians believe that non-prescription medications (88%) and herbal medications (80%) can be advertised directly to consumers in Canada.

### ***Half (54%) Think the Federal Government Currently Regulates Prescription Medication DTCA and About As Many Find Favour With the Regulation***

Awareness of the current limits on DTCA is fairly evenly split. Roughly half (54%) of Canadians believe that the Federal government currently limits DTCA. One-quarter (24%) do not believe that the Federal government currently limits DTCA, and 21 percent “don’t know”. And, after being told of the current regulations, which require that an advertisement can name a condition or illness but can not mention the name of any prescription medication, or the ad can mention the name of a prescription medication but can not name a specific condition or illness that it treats, half (51%) of Canadians find the current regulations favourable. Of those who say the Federal government’s regulations on DTCA are unfavourable (42%), just 12% find them “very unfavourable”.

Younger Canadians aged 18 to 34 (57%) are more likely to find the Federal government’s current regulations favourable than those aged 35 to 54 (49%) or 55 and older (50%). Notably, Canadians who initially oppose DTCA (59%) are significantly more likely than those who initially support it (49%) to find favour with the Federal government’s current regulations.

### ***There Is No Particularly Well Defined Reason As to Why Those Who Find Favour With the Current Regulations Do So...***



The reasons why Canadians who favour the current regulations (51%) give on an open-ended basis for favouring the current regulations are generally vague. Their responses include general mentions (29%), education -- people need to know all the information (16%), and drug information should come from the doctor/pharmacist (9%). Underscoring this general lack of reasoning are the 14% of Canadians who “don’t know” or “give no reason” why they say that they favour the regulations.

***But for Those Who Don’t Find Favour With the Current Regime (42%), the Need to Know Information Is the Motivating Factor***

The primary opposition to the current regulations is that people need to know all the information (37%), followed by “general” opposition (18%), it lets people know what drugs are available (7%) and advertisers should be allowed to give all the information (7%).

***Half (52%) of Canadians Suggest that Education Is The Primary Argument for Allowing DTCA of Prescription Medications – While The Potential for Misleading or Bias Advertising (19%) and Consumer Confusion and Lack of Knowledge (19%) are Key Opposing Arguments***

On an open-ended basis, half (52%) of Canadians indicate that “education/ knowledge/ awareness /information” are the primary arguments supporting DTCA for prescription medications. The next most frequent responses are to “give the consumer choices” (9%) and provide accurate information about drugs/ treatments” (8%). The most frequently mentioned arguments against DTCA for prescription medications are concerns about “misleading / biased advertising” (19%) and “lack of consumer knowledge/confusion/ unknown side-effects” (19%). Other arguments against DTCA include “possible abuse/ addiction” (14%) or that “drug treatment should come from a doctor” (10%).



## ***And While Six in Ten (61%) Think DTCA Should be Open to Any Ailment...***

When asked whether they believe that DTCA should be allowed about any illness or condition people get or about some illness/conditions but not about others, a full six in ten (61%) Canadians think DTCA should apply for any illness or condition. This compares to 38 percent who say that DTCA should apply for only some illness or condition. In Quebec, half (50%) of respondents would prefer DTCA only apply for selective illnesses or conditions – the highest across Canada. Women (41%) are more likely to prefer a selective approach to DTCA than are men (35%).

## ***7 in 10 Think That DTCA for Prescription Medication is Not Like Other Products Or Services And Require Special Regulations...***

However, a full seven in ten (69%) think that DTCA should have special regulations beyond what other product/service advertisements have to follow, while three in ten (30%) say that DTCA should have the same regulations as any other product/service.

## ***Almost All Proposed Regulations on DTCA Get Majority Approval***

After being read each of the following components of the *Made in Canada* solution proposed by the Alliance for Access to Medical Information, the majority of Canadians rate each of the components either “excellent” or “very good”. The *Made in Canada* solution requires that any direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medications:

- describe for whom the product is appropriate and inappropriate;





- describe the major side effects;
- include a “consult your physician” tag line;
- provide sources for further third party, unbiased information; and
- be prescreened and approved by an independent regulatory authority appointed by the government.

As well, the solution would require that the advertisement provide questions to ask their physician and would require that advertisements for new drugs not run until after a 6-month waiting period following Health Canada approval, to allow practicing physicians time to learn about the new medication.

The component that finds the most favour with Canadians is describing the major side effects, as half (49%) rate this regulation as “excellent” and 28 percent rate it as “very good”.

Describing for whom the product is appropriate and inappropriate (44% “excellent” and 29% “very good”) follows next. Two-thirds (64%) say including a “consult your physician” tag line as “excellent” (38%) or “very good” (26%). Six in ten (57%) find a six month period to allow physicians time to familiar themselves with the new medications “excellent” (34%) or “very good” (23%). And, almost as many (58%) say providing sources for third party, unbiased information is “excellent” (33%) or “very good” (25%).

### ***Support For DTCA Rises to 85% When “Made in Canada” Regulations Are Proposed***

Incorporating the *Made in Canada* solution, which resonates well with Canadians, increases public favourability of DTCA to 85% of Canadians. Half (54%) of Canadians say that they





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“strongly agree” with DTCA once the *Made in Canada* solution is implemented. This compares to 15% who disagree (6% strongly).

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