

NEWS RELEASE

Consumers Want Better Information to Support Their Use of Alternative Remedies

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ottawa, Ontario, March 24, 1998 - Nine out of 10 Canadians believe the federal government should increase the amount of information required on the labels of complementary or alternative medicines, according to research presented today by the Nonprescription Drug Manufacturers Association of Canada (NDMAC). Canadians want labelling to tell them the purpose of the remedy (87 %) and to provide safety and side effect warnings (94 %). In the present regulatory environment, many herbal remedies do not carry label claims or complete cautionary labelling. This research by Canada Health Monitor (July 1997) and three other studies were presented at a news conference in Ottawa.

Another survey of over 5000 Canadians (ACNielsen/NDMAC, 1997) demonstrated the impact of this problem: Only one out of 10 users of herbal remedies (9.7 %) rely on the product label as a source of information. By contrast, four out of five Canadians (82 %) report that they always read the label before using a conventional nonprescription medicine for the first time.

"Canadians want to have confidence in the health products they use, and they think there's a role for government to play," said Gerry Harrington, Director of Communications for the NDMAC. Another recent survey (CTV/Angus Reid Group, 1997), found that two thirds of Canadians (67 %) feel that government "should regulate alternative medicines and practices in the same way that they regulate other drugs and practices to make sure they are safe and really do what it is claimed they will do."

Under review by Parliamentary Standing Committee

These and other recent survey findings -- concerning how Canadians feel about herbal and other alternative medicines -- provide food for thought for the Federal Standing Committee on Health as it contemplates a new regulatory framework for natural health products. The Committee is wrapping up hearings which began in December 1997, and is expected to deliver a report with its recommendations to Parliament in April or May.

"An appropriate regulatory framework can play a large role in increasing consumer confidence in the safety and effectiveness of natural health products, by ensuring that consumers have the information they need to use them responsibly and effectively," said David Skinner, President of the NDMAC. "Since the regulatory requirements governing the safety, effectiveness, quality and labelling of nonprescription medicines were modernized in the 1960's and 1970's, the popularity of these products has increased sharply. This has yielded benefits to all Canadians in the form of health care savings, improved quality of life and a healthy self-care products industry."



One out of four Canadians use herbal remedies

The ACNielsen/NDMAC survey found that the trend toward self-medication and self-care continued to accelerate in 1997, particularly with respect to the use of nonprescription herbal remedies. Almost one out of every four Canadians (23.7 %) reported having used a herbal remedy in the 12 months prior to July 1997. By contrast, only one in seven (15 %) had used them in the 12 months prior to April 1996 (ACNielsen/NDMAC, 1996). Conventional nonprescription (over-the-counter) medicines also rose in popularity, with almost 76 percent of Canadians reporting this type of self-care in 1997, compared to 68 percent in 1996.

"This move toward self-care is good news for the Canadian health care system," said Mr. Harrington. "The Standing Committee has an opportunity to entrench the role of self-medication, and of natural health products specifically, as a cost-effective way of managing health within a strained system." A study conducted recently at Queen's University found that the availability of nonprescription medicines generates significant savings for Canada's health care system by reducing costs associated with doctor visits and prescription fees.

The NDMAC is the voice of the Canadian self-medication industry, representing manufacturers of over-the-counter medicines for over 100 years. Its mission is to contribute to quality of life and cost-effective health care for Canadians by creating and maintaining an environment for the growth of responsible self-medication.

BACKGROUNDEERS:

- [Canadian Consumers and Alternative Medicine](#)
- [Proposed Regulatory Framework for Natural Health Products](#)
- [Glossary of Terms](#)
- [NDMAC](#)

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