There is a simple, immediate action the Minister of Health can implement now, without more studying, without more consultation, and without more delays. The Minister of Health should immediately change the eligibility requirements for the Ontario Drug Benefit Program so that persons with catastrophic illnesses are automatically covered under the plan.

This change will help people make treatment decisions based on what is best for their health, and not what they can afford to pay. It will allow people to continue being useful, productive members of society by letting them keep working rather than forcing them to quit their jobs, stop contributing, stop paying taxes, add to the welfare rolls, take up space in subsidized housing, just to get a drug card.

For people with catastrophic illnesses, this change will improve their quality of life, it will help extend their quality of life. And believe me, speaking as a 36 year old, a life extended is a life saved.

It needs to be emphasized that extending ODB coverage alone is not a catastrophic drug funding policy. It does not address alternative therapies or experimental drugs that are not on the ODB list. But it is a start, and begins to uphold the undertaking made by the minister over a year.

I also understand the implementation difficulties, such as deciding which illnesses are catastrophic. My advice would be to keep it simple. Start with the ones where there's no debate over them. The Minister herself has identified the first two: cystic fibrosis and AIDS. Frances Lankin can fix this problem immediately, and I trust in the compassion and integrity of her Cabinet colleagues to support her.

The second thing that can be done is the Minister of Health can direct that the draft of [not sure of this word] AIDS funding policy document be dusted off and fast-tracked. There is no reason why this program should not be in place in six months. People living with AIDS cannot afford to wait.