

# Creating Capacity in Primary Care

## Neighbourhood Pharmacies' Position:

- Pharmacies are the first and often most frequent point of contact patients have with the healthcare system. Pharmacists are on the frontlines. They deliver critical services, including medication therapies, disease management and innovative solutions in communities spanning urban, rural, and remote Canada. More can be done to leverage the role of trusted, accessible, clinically educated pharmacists to alleviate backlogs and create capacity in primary care.
- By enabling point of care testing in community pharmacies, pharmacists can screen for infectious diseases and monitor chronic disease therapies – with shorter turnaround times. Offering this testing in pharmacies will allow expedited decision-making and increase patient care efficiency. Pharmacists should also have access to laboratory results and electronic medical records to ensure continuity of care and promote collaborative care.
- Pharmacists can assess, diagnose, prescribe and initiate medication therapy for common ailments and conditions in many provinces. Patients appreciate the ability to receive prompt care for minor ailments at their pharmacy, and studies have shown that this is an efficient use of health system resources. All provinces should allow pharmacists to provide this service to their patients.
- Fair, sustainable remuneration is vital for pharmacists. It supports the training and infrastructure needed to preserve and promote continuous delivery of the critical pharmacy services that Canadians and local healthcare systems rely on heavily.



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With nearly 11,000 pharmacies and more than 35,000 pharmacy professionals practicing in virtually every community in Canada, community pharmacies are vital to our healthcare system.[1] They are typically open extended hours and offer primary care with convenience and superior accessibility. As designated Essential Services, pharmacies are crucial links in the primary healthcare system, providing critical, uninterrupted care in a coordinated way with other healthcare providers. Pharmacies ensure efficient, effective continuity of care close to home while alleviating pressures on other primary care services.

Canadians see their pharmacist up to ten times more frequently than any other healthcare provider.[2] Even though they represent the third largest group of healthcare providers in Canada (after nurses and physicians[3],[4]), pharmacists are an underutilized resource in the healthcare system. Pharmacists consistently rank among the most trusted healthcare providers and are critical for patients' health and wellness needs.[5] Ninety-three per cent of Canadians have a positive impression of pharmacists, believing they are an essential part of healthcare.[6] Pharmacist interventions correlate with increased vaccination rates, better health outcomes, and improved return on investment for every dollar spent.

Pharmacists are considered the primary providers of medication management services. They can identify and resolve significant drug therapy problems and help prevent patients from hospitalizations. In Canada, reported adverse drug events account for about 12 per cent of emergency department visits and cost our healthcare system an estimated \$2.6 billion in hospitalizations each year.[7] The most common causes of preventable hospitalizations are noncompliance, adverse drug reactions, and improper drug selection.[8] Leveraging the expertise, training, and accessibility of pharmacists could reduce hospitalization rates and noncompliance complications.

Pharmacists can be enabled to play a greater role in initiating and monitoring therapy for chronic diseases. Studies examining the impact of pharmacist involvement in managing hypertension in Canada concluded that \$15.7 billion in savings over 30 years could be realized with full pharmacist intervention compared to usual care.[9]



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Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacies and pharmacists acted under the temporary legislative exemptions to Section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to ensure that patients receive an uninterrupted supply of their opioid therapy. Pharmacists' support in this area reduces the risk of patients experiencing extreme withdrawal. It also discourages patients from seeking illicit sources while providing the necessary monitoring and follow-up to mitigate potential abuse or diversion risks. Government's goal should be to make these changes permanent by including pharmacists as practitioners under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

Eighty per cent of Canadians are likely to visit a pharmacist for advice on their medications and manage common ailments such as flu and cold.[10] In most provinces, pharmacists assess, diagnose, prescribe, and initiate medication therapy for many common conditions and ailments. A recent analysis of common ailments programs in Canada estimates that these ailments account for 10-20 per cent of physician workload, at a time when physicians already face significant capacity strains.[11]

Most Canadians (89 per cent) agree that pharmacists' services should be covered by provincial healthcare plans – like the services provided in a hospital or physician's office.[12] As highly valuable healthcare providers, pharmacists should be adequately funded for the critical services they provide. Reimbursement for services that are universally and publicly funded through other parts of the healthcare system should be made available for those same services provided in pharmacies to ensure equitable access of these services for Canadians.

Pharmacy has proven its effectiveness on the frontlines of primary care. In the early months of the pandemic, health system resources were at capacity. Pharmacists remained accessible, providing trusted health information and continuity of care. Pharmacists and pharmacy operators continue to demonstrate resilience, an unwavering commitment to patients, and an unmatched primary care infrastructure throughout Canada.



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