

# Neighbourhood Pharmacy Gazette

WINTER 2021

 **INSIGHTS. ADVOCACY. HEALTHIER CANADIANS.**

A publication of the Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada



## Take Care

WHAT YOU NEED TO  
KNOW ABOUT TODAY'S  
WELLNESS CONSUMER

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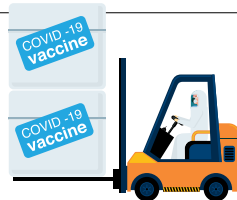
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# Neighbourhood Pharmacy Gazette

INSIGHTS. ADVOCACY. HEALTHIER CANADIANS.

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# The deeper meaning of wellness in 2021

**Before the pandemic, I regularly hit the gym for my physical and mental fitness.** Not being able to continue to do so was a huge adjustment, but I've come to have a renewed appreciation for slower paced activities that force me to be more introspective and reflective, such as yoga and long walks.

Chances are we have all had to try something new, or try harder, to maintain an even keel during this terribly unsettling time. As explored in this issue's cover story ([page 5](#)), personal wellness has taken on a much deeper meaning, particularly in the area of mental health ([page 10](#)), yet it can be more challenging due to the restrictions imposed by public health safety measures. We've had to refocus our efforts. On the other hand, perhaps this was long overdue in a world that was so fast-paced that we may have put our needs last, especially for mental wellbeing.

The definition of preventative care has additionally evolved now that "infectious disease" is part of our daily lexicon. Hand hygiene and physical distancing will likely continue long after the pandemic is finally over.

Vaccination against COVID-19 is a vital part of that broader understanding of preventative care. The coming months will see a vaccination campaign the likes of which we've never seen before, and pharmacy will be integral to its success

([page 13](#)). Yet even so we are dogged by the whisperings of doubt. Will enough people get vaccinated in order to turn this tide?

Distrust is often a key factor underlying vaccine hesitancy: distrust in the vaccine's effectiveness and safety, and for some a distrust in the healthcare system. [Public opinion polling](#) by the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) in December found that one in three Canadians plans to get the vaccine as soon as possible and 48 per cent will "wait a bit."

Healthcare providers are a vital bridge for building trust and overcoming vaccine hesitancy. The CPhA poll also reinforced Canadians' high level of trust in pharmacists as immunizers. Speaking on behalf of the members of Neighbourhood Pharmacies, I can add that huge efforts are underway to help community pharmacists leverage that trust in order to instill confidence in Canadians.

March is Pharmacy Appreciation Month, formerly known as Pharmacy Awareness Month. The new name reflects all that pharmacists have done—and continue to do—to adapt to the changing healthcare needs of Canadians during a pandemic. Our wellness journey during this time is far from over, and I hope you agree that we appreciate that pharmacists are with us every step of the way.



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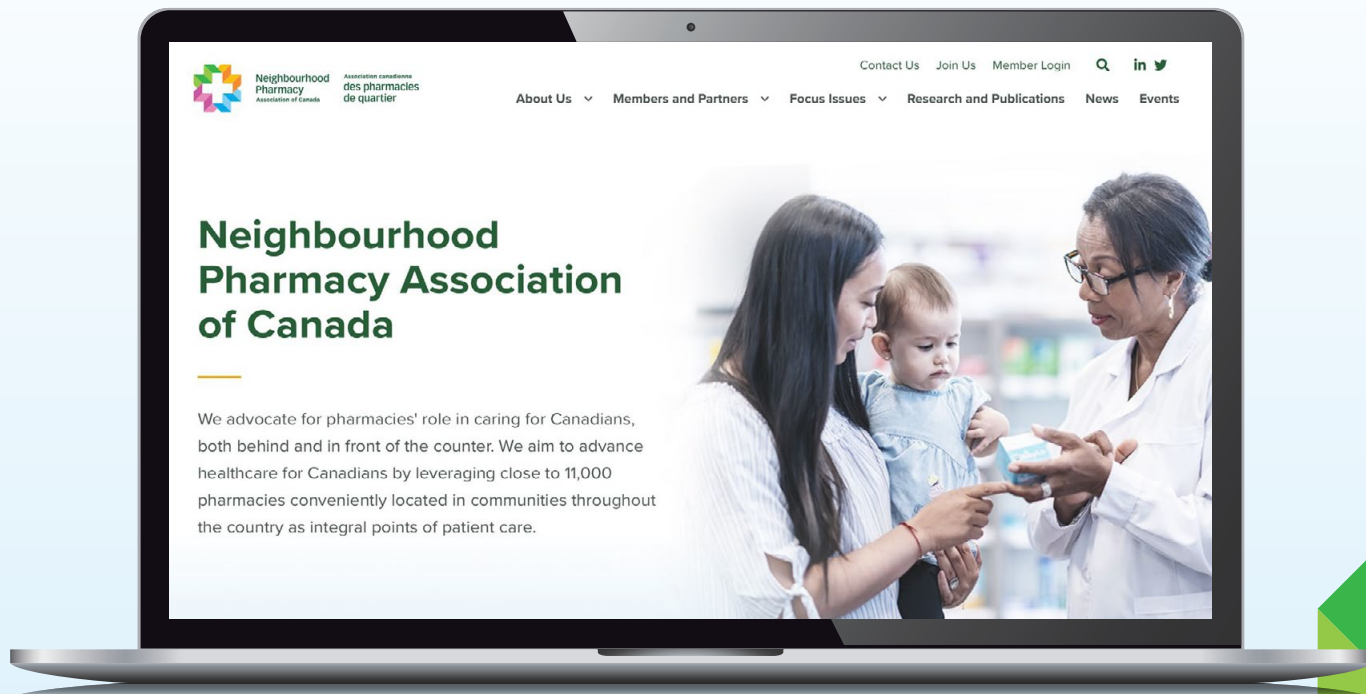
“The coming months will see a vaccination campaign the likes of which we've never seen before, and pharmacy will be integral to its success.”





# Welcome to the Neighbourhood

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**Check out our new online home, renovated and refreshed to serve you better.**

**It's easier to locate our informative publications, including:**

- *Neighbourhood Pharmacy Gazette*
- *2020 Year in Review: Stepping Up Together*
- Our Position Statements (on public health capacity, pharmacare and scope of practice, to name just a few)
- "The Big Business of WELL" research report
- "A Primer on the Value of Specialty Pharmacy Services for Patients and Healthcare Systems in Canada"
- And more!



**Neighbourhood  
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**Association canadienne  
des pharmacies  
de quartier**



A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light green t-shirt and dark grey leggings, is sitting on a beige carpeted floor. She is smiling and reaching forward with her right arm, holding the foot of a young girl. The girl, with light brown hair and bangs, is wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt and dark blue leggings. She is also sitting on the floor, leaning forward and holding her right foot with both hands. In the background, there is a brown sofa, a potted plant, and framed artwork on a light blue wall.

# Take Care

# 5

*traits you need to know about today's wellness consumer*

**The stress, uncertainty and fear caused by COVID-19 over the past year have dramatically affected consumer behaviour.** Witness the bunker-style mentality of stockpiling essential goods such as toilet paper, the massive shift to online shopping and the plethora of ways explored to combat isolation and loneliness, from virtual gaming with friends to skyrocketing sales of outdoor gear.

A single driving force is behind all of these behaviours: a renewed appreciation of the importance and fragility of health. A June 2020 survey by New York-based WSL Strategic Retail revealed that 73 per cent of consumers worry they will get sick. Multiple other surveys show skyrocketing rates of sadness, depression

and anxiety. The pandemic has reignited—and for some, newly ignited—consumers' quest for health and wellbeing, for themselves and their loved ones.

"Given the nature of COVID-19, one of the elements of restoring a sense of control and safety is managing your health, especially when you are dealing with a disease that preys on co-morbidities," says Doug Stephens, founder of the Hamilton-based retail consulting firm, Retail Prophet, and author of the forthcoming book, *Resurrecting Retail: The future of business in a post-pandemic world*.

"Combine this with the fact that we are already dealing with a rapidly aging population and a large group of baby boomers who don't want to age the way

their parents aged—when you underpin this with the threat of COVID-19 and what it represents, that's why we are seeing such a big focus on the idea of actively pursuing wellness."

That focus bodes well for the pharmacy sector if it can understand how best to respond to the factors contributing to consumer behaviour in the age of COVID-19.

While pharmacy may never be able to "out-app" purely digital spaces like Amazon, it can provide what can't be ordered online: human connection. "This is an opportune time to build equity with the consumer and strengthen the emotional relationship," says Tony Chapman, a Toronto-based [retail consultant](#) and host of radio show [Chatter that Matters](#).

*Neighbourhood Pharmacy Gazette* gathered insights from Stephens, Chapman and Liz Gretkowski, a senior consultant with WSL, to describe five key consumer behaviours that are shaping wellness trends.

## 1 Home sweet home (or trying to be)

[Statistics Canada](#) reports that five million Canadians started working from home during the pandemic and, according to the Vancouver-based polling firm [Research Co.](#), 73 per cent believe the work-from-home trend will continue after the pandemic because of persistent safety concerns.

The home is now a workspace, classroom, entertainment centre, remote gathering place and (sometimes cramped) fitness area. The-do-it-at-home mindset has boosted renovations: a [TD Bank](#) survey conducted in September 2020 found that 37 per cent of Canadians have done or plan to do significant home renovations to accommodate their new lifestyle. The early days of lockdown also saw massive spikes in the online sales of products such as bread machines (up 652 per cent in the U.S. in March 2020) and weight training equipment (up 307 per cent), according to retail technology company [Stackline](#).

Most significantly for retailers, the home has become a place of e-commerce with online purchasing and direct-to-home delivery—not just because physical shops are closed or less convenient, but also because consumers want to limit contacts with strangers.

"This is one of the biggest shifts we've seen during COVID-19," says Gretkowski. Even essential retailers have seen dramatic changes. WSL's research found that 54 per cent of shoppers ordered groceries and health products online for pick-up and delivery during the pandemic and half of them did so

for the first time. Home deliveries for prescriptions jumped from 21 per cent to 37 per cent.

"Online shopping is definitely here to stay," says Gretkowski. "Once consumers try it and see how easy it is, they stick

to it." Her firm predicts 75 per cent of shoppers will continue to shop online post-COVID-19.

COVID-19 has also stoked readiness and demand for virtual healthcare services. Seventy per cent of Canadians agree that virtual healthcare represents the future of healthcare and an overwhelming majority of working Canadians (82 per cent) agree their employer should provide access to virtual healthcare, according to the 2020 report by [Environics Research](#), *Canadian Attitudes on Healthcare and Telemedicine*.

Virtual care represents "a call to action for pharmacies," says Gretkowski. "Pharmacies don't want to lose their customers because they aren't offering telehealth. It's important to meet your customers where they are at in their life. And right now, they are at home."

## 2 Driven by convenience

Time management competes with price, as 53 per cent of consumers say they plan to shop in ways that save time even if it means they have to pay higher prices, according to WSL.

Consumers are also more comfortable with time-saving digital tools such as self-checkout and digital coupons. Twenty-two per cent of shoppers use digital coupons, of whom 55 per cent started using them during COVID-19. "It saves time and makes the check-out experience much faster," says Gretkowski.

She adds that pharmacies also need to be thinking of expanding their delivery methods to ensure consumers get their products quickly. "Curbside pick-up is a given. Everyone should be doing that."

She notes that even quick trips are moving online. "It's not worth it for shoppers to run into the store

**“This is an opportune time to build equity with the consumer and strengthen the emotional relationship.”**



and pick up something when they can shop 24/7 from their mobile phone and get delivery in an hour or a day. There's a big call to the pharmacy to think about convenience in a new way because getting out of the car, putting on a mask, getting the kids out of the car, finding a product and waiting in line—this is not the future.”

Having said that, as an essential service provider that will always be open regardless of lockdowns, the bricks-and-mortar pharmacy has come to represent an oasis for consumers who need to talk about, see or get immediate access to products or services related to health.

The trick, then, is to make the in-store experience as convenient and time-efficient as possible. For example, use shelf tags to identify specific types of products, such as organic, vegan or sugar-free, and merchandise by solution, rather than by category. Pull together displays that offer multiple products for a single need, be it to reduce stress, boost immunity or manage diabetes. “If it's a customer with sleep issues, rather than having melatonin, vitamins, lavender essential oil and chamomile tea in separate aisles, you can group them and say, ‘Here are your solutions for better sleep,’” says Gretkowski.

Equally important, increase the visibility and promote the availability of pharmacists. “Pharmacies have respected, highly trained healthcare professionals to bring their brand ‘personality’ to life. This too is a highly valued form of convenience, for consumers who need to speak with a real person, sooner than later,” says Chapman. He adds that pharmacists can be proactive by making themselves available for regularly scheduled virtual chats, with content that addresses frequently asked questions.

### 3 *Troubled in mind*

The isolation and loneliness caused by COVID-19 and the unprecedented decline in social activity have taken a toll on mental health. In 2019, two-thirds of Canadians said their mental health was good or very good; in 2020, only 53 per cent could say the same, according to an October 2020 report by [Angus Reid](#). The percentage of Canadians categorized as “The Desolate,” who suffer from both loneliness and social isolation, increased from 23 per cent to 33 per cent. One in five now say their mental health is poor or very poor.

Forty-one per cent of Canadians say stress is their number one obstacle to good health, followed by lack of sleep (35 per cent). “Forty-nine per cent of consumers say it's important to attend to their mental health—

they realize they need downtime, that they have to take care of themselves and find ways not to be so stressed,” says Gretkowski. “The opportunity for pharmacy is to address it, to bring it to light, whether that's providing sleep aids or vitamins for mental health. What are the products that can help people relax?”

Mental health conversations were already entering the mainstream before 2020; now, it's almost part of daily communications from political leaders and public health experts as we cautiously navigate the uncharted territory of a pandemic.

Pharmacies have an opportunity to be part of that conversation beyond the pharmacy counter. They can engage stressed-out consumers by offering compelling content adjacent to products and services, such as a video recordings, articles, podcasts or virtual sessions with experts, including their own pharmacists. Pharmacists can also recommend or “prescribe” vetted mental health apps, such as those curated by [Therappx](#), a Canadian firm founded by pharmacists.

“There is a hunger for information and a sense of connection and community. If the local pharmacy is not just the place I go to when I am not feeling well but is also a beacon for great information, that gives me added value,” says Stephens. “The differentiator between pharmacies that truly succeed and those that struggle will be the fact that they are not solely reliant on product and prices but find valuable and creative ways to engage customers.”

For example, pharmacies can partner with local practitioners to offer or promote free mindfulness clinics or yoga sessions. They can help reduce stress due to misinformation or the lack of information by posting weekly briefings or bulletins on COVID-19,

## *The Big Business of WELL*

In early March 2020, WSL Strategic Retail surveyed Canadians on behalf of Neighbourhood Pharmacies to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of pharmacy and shopping behaviours, particularly in the areas of health and wellness. The resulting report, *The Big Business of Well*, is available on [Neighbourhood Pharmacies' website](#).

including vaccination details, suggests Chapman.

(For more on mental health, focussing on depression and anxiety, see [page 10](#).)

#### 4 **Infection rejection**

Heightened cleaning protocols and contactless experiences are the new norms, as 64 per cent of consumers say they are trying to avoid germs, says Gretkowski.

Boosting immunity is a primary objective. The global vitamins, minerals and supplements market was on track to grow by more than 25 per cent in 2020, and that trajectory is expected to continue into 2021, according to [Bolst Global's Health and Wellness Trends](#) report.

"People are much more focussed on their immunity, taking vitamins and also keeping their house clean," says Gretkowski. "When we talk about solution merchandising, these are the solutions people are looking for—how do I keep my hands clean, my house clean, the air in my house clean, and how do I build immunity, so my health is stronger?"

"The emphasis is on trying to make yourself more

bulletproof to infection and disease spread," adds Stephens. While all retailers need to take ownership of making sure their stores are clean, well-organized and disinfected, pharmacies are especially well positioned to take the extra step of helping consumers with best practices for both personal preventative care and the home.

"Home is no longer just where the heart is, it is literally where the health is. What is pharmacy doing to help customers protect themselves and their families? Pharmacies can become real thought leaders on how consumers can build their immune systems," says Chapman.

#### 5 **Conscious consumerism**

Consumers are reasserting a sense of community to counteract the isolation forced upon them by COVID-19. The ability to do good, to help others, is a powerful way to do that—including efforts to support local businesses hit hard by the pandemic.

A November 2020 survey by the [Retail Council of Canada](#) found that 90 per cent of Canadians intended



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to shop locally during the holiday season. “Those of us who remain employed are more focussed on putting our paychecks to good use, including by bolstering local businesses and helping neighbours in need,” writes Marian Salzman in *ZoomsDay Predictions: Trends for 2021*.

“The pandemic crisis has very real implications for sustainability and social responsibility,” says Stephens. “It has shown us the degree to which we are truly interconnected on a global level. It has brought home just how small this world really is.”

“To give is the new reward,” summarizes Chapman, adding: “In pharmacy, loyalty points could be used to help the community, to provide goods for people who can’t afford them.”

Before the pandemic, consumers were already embracing social causes and environmental concerns. A June 2020 study of almost 20,000 in 28 countries by Research Insights found that 57 per cent are willing to change their purchasing habits to help reduce the negative impact to the environment. Of those who say this is very or extremely important, seven out of

10 would pay a premium of 35 per cent, on average, for brands that are sustainable and environmentally responsible.

Conscious consumerism extends to the type of food people eat. In 2018, 17 per cent of Canadians reported they are vegan, vegetarian, pescatarian or flexitarian, according to a study by Dalhousie University. The majority are under 35 and are likely to raise their families with the same eating habits.

The pandemic is accelerating changes in consumer behaviour that were already underway. What the surreal reality of the virus has added for many, however, is a greater sense of purpose, one that circles around health and wellbeing at all levels—physical, mental and social. As healthcare providers in the retail space, pharmacies are uniquely situated to help achieve this higher purpose.



*Anne Bokma is an award-winning journalist in Hamilton, Ontario, and former editor of Pharmacy Practice.*

## Building resiliency in Canada's healthcare system

By Brian Heath, Vice-President and General Manager at Amgen Canada Inc.



**A year has passed since the COVID-19 pandemic began in Canada.** The first wave dramatically impacted healthcare systems across the country, exposing gaps and fragilities previously overlooked.

Efforts to protect the most vulnerable, leverage digital health tools and technologies, and establish new public health protocols have had modest success in slowing the spread of COVID-19. However, the second wave of infections has exacerbated weaknesses in our health systems—from delays in treatments and surgeries, to hidden crises in long-term care and immunization frameworks.

That's why it's so important for Canada to focus immediate efforts on building stronger and more resilient health systems in order to predict, prevent, manage and mitigate future crises.

With this mission in mind, Amgen, together with more than 50 other health system leaders, including Neighbourhood Pharmacies,

have come together to discuss how best to achieve health system resilience. Four overarching policy pillars are needed:

- 1) View health spending as an investment, not a cost;
- 2) Break down the siloes impeding the delivery of seamless, integrated and coordinated care;
- 3) Leverage data, tools and technologies to measure health outcomes and maximize value; and
- 4) Increase collaboration across public, private and non-profit sectors.

Fueled by such early discussions, Amgen is increasing its engagement with prospective partners committed to addressing health system issues. The goals are to better integrate and analyze data, accelerate and expand access to innovative diagnostics and treatments, and leverage the skills of pharmacists and other healthcare professionals.

We look forward to working closely with Neighbourhood Pharmacies and its members to identify the critical steps toward greater resilience in Canadian healthcare systems.

### PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

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# Mental healthcare part of long road to recovery



## Few will deny that it has been a long 12 months.

We are all feeling the strain of isolation, new routines, screen fatigue and anxiety about the future. Not to mention the disturbing social effects accelerated by COVID-19: political polarization and renewed awareness of socioeconomic divides. Even if we as individuals are not particularly worried about infection, a new level of anxiety pervades all of our lives.

Mental health clinicians and researchers quickly realized that this pandemic has the potential to tip those vulnerable to mental health issues from a healthy, coping state into an anxious, debilitated state. Since March 2020, a steady stream of survey data indicates that they are right:

- Forty per cent of Canadians said that their mental health has deteriorated since the onset of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>
- Twenty-seven percent of those with pre-existing mental health issues reported an increase in suicidal thoughts and feelings, up from 18 per cent during the first wave of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>
- Overall, 24 per cent of Canadians reported their mental health was worse during the second wave than the first wave.<sup>2</sup>
- Eight per cent of persons felt depressed five to seven days out of every week, a 33 per cent increase from June 2020.<sup>3</sup>

These results have prompted some to predict a mental health crisis that will be just as damaging to our health as COVID-19.

What does drug utilization data tell us?

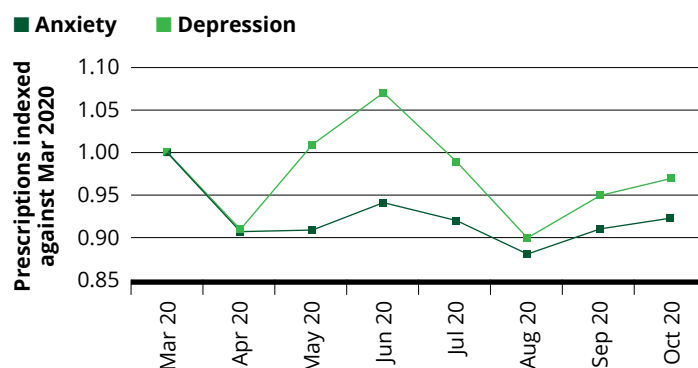
Psychotherapeutics already represent the largest drug category by prescription volume in Canada, according to IQVIA.<sup>4</sup> We would expect that increased feelings of anxiety and depression would be marked by a surge in prescriptions to treat these conditions. To date, however, that has not happened.

While prescriptions dispensed for depression and anxiety peaked in June, this was followed by a trough in August and reflects the after-effects of provincial 30-day supply policies during the first wave of the pandemic. British Columbia, which did not implement a similar drug supply policy, shows a very flat trend from March 2020 onwards.<sup>5</sup>

Why do we not see an increase in drugs used to treat mental health conditions when Canadians clearly report increased mental health concerns? Three main possibilities exist:

1. People remain undiagnosed and untreated because:
  - a. they have not sought help and are attempting to manage on their own; or
  - b. they have found it too difficult to access healthcare.

## Drugs for Anxiety and Depression



Source: IQVIA Canadian Rx Lite, retail pharmacy. Mar 2020 to Oct 2020.

2. People are getting non-pharmacological treatment, such as internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy (iCBT).
3. People are self-medicating in ways that could cause harm. Two surveys found that approximately one in five Canadians have increased their use of alcohol and controlled substances.<sup>1,3</sup> The Public Health Agency of Canada reported the highest quarterly count of apparent opioid toxicity deaths between April and June 2020 since surveillance began in 2016.<sup>6</sup> These harmful behaviours compound mental health concerns and make effective treatment much more challenging.

For all three of these possibilities, pharmacists can play an important role given their frequent interactions with the public. With appropriate training and remuneration, they can screen for people who may be experiencing new or increased mental health concerns and help them navigate treatment options, including iCBT and healthcare apps. Pharmacists can play a

direct, ongoing role to support care—witness the success of the Bloom program in Nova Scotia, funded by the province and in its seventh year. In recent years, at least two research projects are underway to evaluate an expanded role for pharmacists in mental healthcare. A study in Australia concluded that pharmacists are capable of conducting screening and risk assessment services for depression, which can improve rates of early detection.<sup>7</sup>

The increased involvement of community-based pharmacists in mental healthcare is more than an opportunity. It is a call to action. As these statistics attest, for many Canadians the COVID-19 vaccine will be just the first step on a long road to recovery.



*Jeff Mehlretter is a Consultant at Mehlretter Pharma Consulting. jeffmehlretter@gmail.com*

**References:** 1. Mental health impacts of COVID-19: Wave 2. Canadian Mental Health Association and The University of B.C. in partnership with maru/matchbox; 2. In the News: Mental Health, Stress and Anxiety. Leger Weekly Survey: Oct 19, 2020; 3. Examining the Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health and Substance Use among Canadians. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. 2020 Nov; 4. Licensed from IQVIA. Rx Premium, retail pharmacy. Annual period ending Dec 2020; 5. Licensed from IQVIA. Canadian Rx Lite, retail pharmacy. Selected drugs from anxiety and depression. Mar 2020 to Oct 2020; 6. Opioid- and Stimulant-related Harms in Canada. Public Health Agency of Canada. 2020 Dec; 7. O'Reilly CL, Wong E, Chen TF. A feasibility study of community pharmacists performing depression screening services. RSAP. 2015 June;11(3):364-81.

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# How we survived and made strides in the year that was

**The pandemic's impact is nothing short of devastating, yet it has also triggered unprecedented levels of collaboration, innovation and transformation.** Community pharmacy, in many ways, is in the thick of it. As we chart new territory in a world with COVID-19, Neighbourhood Pharmacies invites you to check out our *2020 Year in Review: Stepping Up Together*, for a detailed retrospective on our Association's role in the year that was.

The *Year in Review* summarizes how Neighbourhood Pharmacies' advocacy, education and research work helped to move the needle on critical healthcare priorities, including:

- Pharmacies' capabilities to deliver immunizations (seasonal influenza, COVID-19 vaccines and all other recommended vaccinations);
- Modernization of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to better enable pharmacists to fight the worsening opioid crisis;
- COVID-19 testing;
- National pharmacare (with renewed emphasis given the economic repercussions of COVID-19; see [page 19](#) for details); and
- Pharmaceutical supply and drug shortages.



The Association developed seven position statements to inform its strategic direction and establish a strong foundation for future initiatives, including our grassroots advocacy program (more details on [page 16](#)).

The *Year in Review* includes useful statistics about community pharmacy, including its contribution to the Canadian economy. And you'll find highlights and quick links to our research reports in the areas of long-term care, specialty pharmacy, Canadians' wellness attitudes, the early impact of COVID-19 on pharmacy and national pharmacare.

Check out Neighbourhood Pharmacies' *2020 Year in Review: Stepping Up Together*



**11,000**  
Community  
pharmacies  
in Canada



**5 km**  
Maximum average  
distance to a pharmacy  
for most Canadians



**\$8.2 billion**  
Gross domestic product  
directly generated by  
pharmacy sector

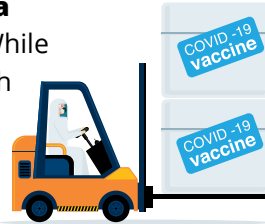


**163,400**  
Canadians directly  
employed by  
pharmacy sector

# Canada's maze for vaccine distribution

## The dawn of a new year brings a light at the end of the tunnel.

While COVID-19 continues to tear through communities across Canada, the rollout of new, effective vaccines promises an eventual end to the ongoing pandemic.

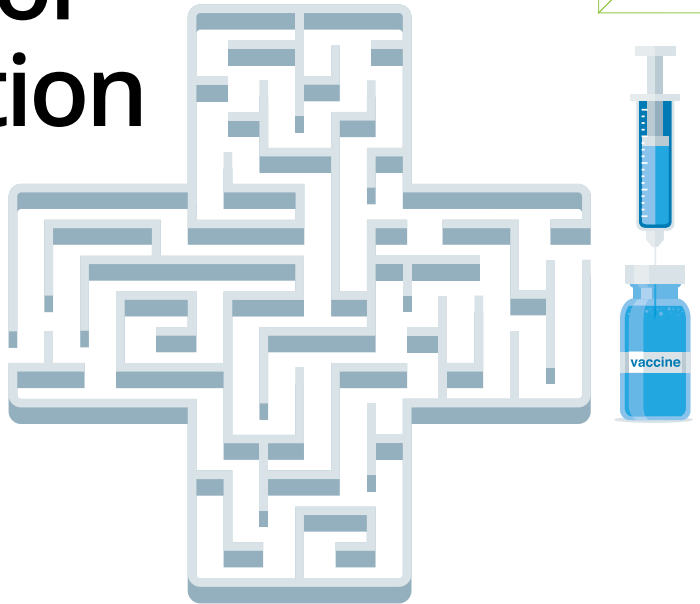


As with all publicly funded vaccines, Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) orders and procures the products on behalf of the federal government and all provincial and territorial governments. PSPC and the Public Health Agency of Canada then face a raft of distribution challenges—and a patchwork of approaches to distribution across our provinces and territories. There are two distinct phases to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout: initially, a slow and halting trickle of doses that are rationed to those in most need. Later, as production ramps up and more products are approved, mass vaccination will kick in and the goal will be to get as many people protected as quickly as possible.

In Canada, our federalism makes this more complicated. We cannot have a truly national effort in distribution of the vaccines because healthcare is the constitutional responsibility of the provinces. As a result, different parts of the country have different priorities and distribution models.

We see evidence of this in the provinces' respective plans and stages. For example, Nova Scotia would like to involve pharmacists as vaccine administrators closer to the beginning of its distribution plan, while Saskatchewan will involve pharmacists as the campaign broadens and Ontario plans for the inclusion of pharmacy locations in its final stage.

The success of mass vaccination is inconceivable without the wide-scale involvement of pharmacy. Many decisions need to be made: Who will be prioritized? How will compliance with a two-dose regime be ensured? How will the vaccine be safely administered to large numbers? How will supply be tracked? How will



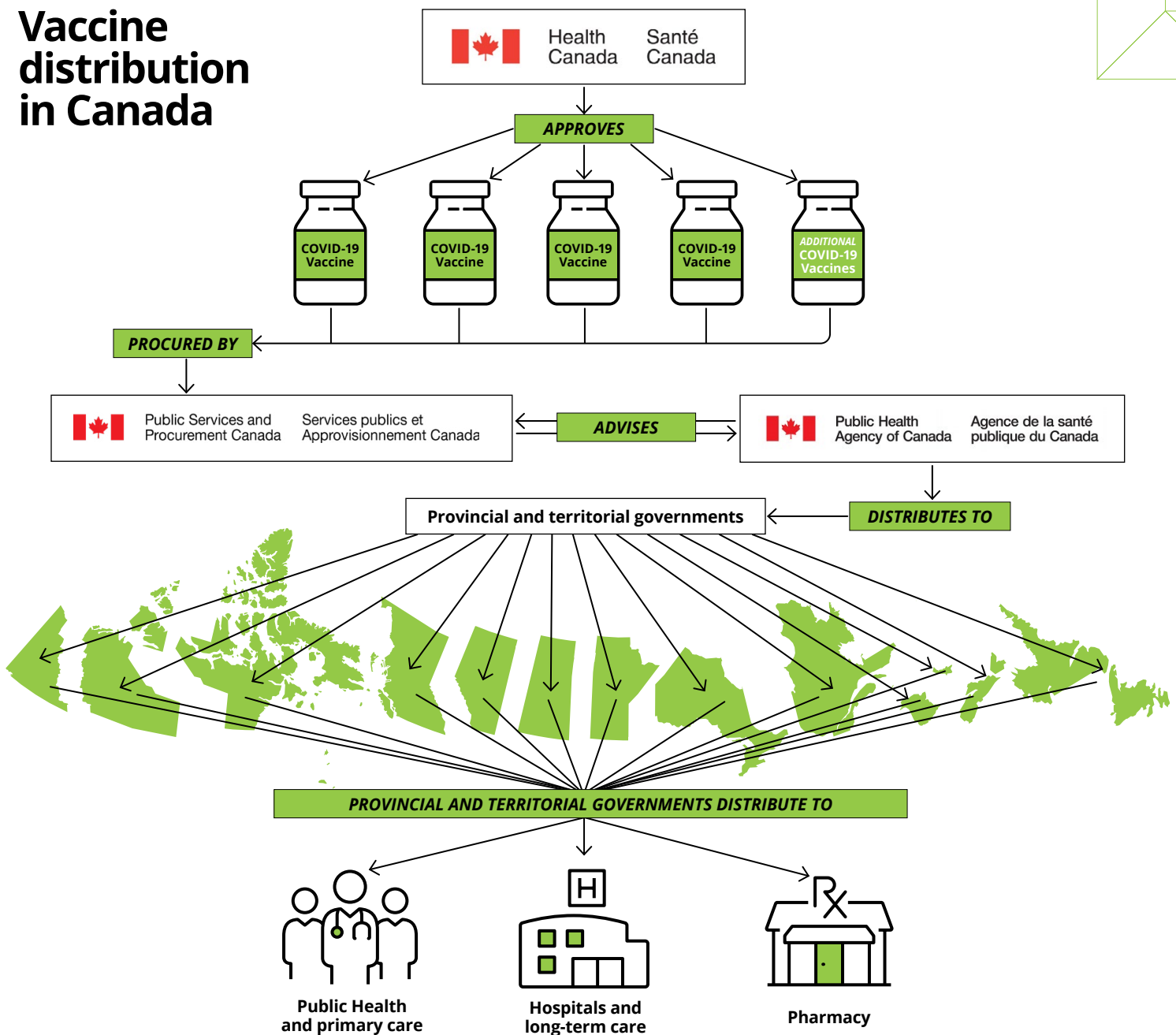
pharmacy and pharmacist participation be maximized? How will we avoid the shortages some provinces saw in this year's flu season? Different provinces will have different solutions.

To complicate matters further, provinces and territories have no say in which vaccines they receive, their quantities or timing. The federal government makes these decisions. Provinces may prefer to have more of the vaccine that can be stored in refrigerators, which opens the door wider for pharmacy involvement, but this is not something they can control. Federal and provincial leaders will inevitably politicize gaps in supply and distribution.

These are existential issues for government. Every elected official in Canada, from provincial backbenchers to the Prime Minister, knows that vaccine rollout will decide their fate at the next election. For all the novel complications a COVID-19 vaccine campaign poses, governments must learn from past success—in this case, the central role pharmacy has assumed in seasonal influenza vaccination campaigns.

This brings us to the final, and in some ways most difficult, challenge: making sure enough Canadians are confident in the vaccine to achieve herd immunity. There are promising signs. Recent public opinion polling indicates the willingness to get immunized has inched upwards since vaccine rollout has begun.

# Vaccine distribution in Canada



But any of the difficulties described above could negatively impact consumer confidence. And in an age of fake news, when so many people are deeply skeptical of experts and politicians, even the best-designed public education campaign by government will have its limits. Pharmacists again can make a critical difference in dispelling vaccine hesitancy.

Whatever approach a province takes for distribution, the best way to make sure millions of Canadians choose to get vaccinated is to leverage their bonds of trust with their healthcare providers. As drug and medication

experts, healthcare workers on the frontline and fixtures of the community (remaining open throughout the pandemic), few are better placed than Canada's pharmacists and pharmacies to make vaccine rollout a success—and defeat this terrible disease.



*Matt Boudreau is a Senior Account Director at Hill+Knowlton Strategies.*





# THANK YOU PHARMACY



Across the country, Canadians have relied on you to support them through the COVID-19 pandemic. This March and every day, thank you, pharmacy, for your dedication to your patients and your profession.

# Pharmacy Appreciation Month

MARCH 2021

#PAM2021

# Where we stand on current healthcare issues

## Advocacy drives everything we do at Neighbourhood Pharmacies.

With the immense and often competing pressures facing governments during the pandemic, 2021 is unquestionably a year to showcase to decision-makers the incredible value pharmacy provides healthcare systems nationwide.

Neighbourhood Pharmacies' seven position statements encapsulate our priorities, communicate recommended actions and articulate the benefits to governments, Canadians and other stakeholders. The full statements are available [on our website](#).

### Creating Capacity in Public Health



- Pharmacies are a preferred destination for immunization services.
- The pharmaceutical distribution system facilitates vaccine distribution with a high degree of efficiency.
- Pharmacist-administered point of care testing supports disease screening initiatives, including rapid COVID-19 testing.
- Pharmacists are prepared to deliver additional support in managing prescribed opioid therapy and supporting harm reduction strategies.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enable pharmacists to administer all vaccines and fund pharmacists' vaccination services.
- Use the pharmaceutical distribution system for all vaccines.
- Enable pharmacists to conduct point of care testing, order lab tests and access lab test results.
- Make permanent the temporary changes to Health Canada's Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and build on that to further expand pharmacists' role in opioid therapy management.
- Fund pharmacists' services to educate on the use of naloxone and use pharmacies as a network for distribution.

## Our Top 7 Priorities

1. Creating Capacity in Public Health
2. Creating Capacity in Primary Care
3. Pharmacists' Scope of Practice
4. National Pharmacare
5. Medical Cannabis
6. Pharmaceutical Price Compression
7. Pharmaceutical Supply & Drug Shortages

### Creating Capacity in Primary Care



- Pharmacies are often Canadians' first and/or most frequent point of contact with the healthcare system.
- Pharmacists can alleviate backlogs in primary care.
- Almost all provinces have authorized pharmacists to assess and prescribe for common ailments. Yet only three provinces fund this service (with limited funding in a fourth).
- Electronic health records, lab results and point of care testing enable pharmacists to effectively monitor chronic disease therapies and screen for infectious disease.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement fair, sustainable public funding for primary care services by pharmacists to encourage their uptake by both pharmacists and patients.
- Enable pharmacists to conduct point of care testing, order lab tests and access lab test results.
- Enable pharmacies to access electronic health records.

### Pharmacist Scope of Practice

- Pharmacists can do more to cost-effectively close gaps in today's healthcare system.
- Underutilized capabilities in the pharmacist's scope of practice include: the ability to renew, adapt and initiate prescriptions, administer medications by injection, conduct testing and administer immunizations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Fund pharmacy services beyond medication fulfillment to capitalize on pharmacists' expanded scope of practice and foster a more efficient use of healthcare resources.
- Consider the value of pharmacy services using a system-wide lens. Where pharmacy services are equivalent to services provided by other healthcare providers, reimbursement levels should be the same.

## National Pharmacare



- Canada's pharmacies serve millions of patients across the country, and the sector has a deep understanding of the gaps that currently exist in drug coverage.
- An overwhelming majority of Canadians are concerned about the potential impact of a national pharmacare program on their existing drug coverage.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prioritize coverage for the uninsured and underinsured, including those with rare diseases.
- Build upon current federal-provincial-territorial efforts to work together to provide drug coverage to Canadians who need it most, while ensuring continuity of coverage for those who already have it.
- Establish guiding principles to ensure an equitable approach, while maintaining the integrity of existing provincial and private plans.

## Medical Cannabis



- Pharmacists are well situated to educate, support and counsel patients on the safe, effective use of medical cannabis.
- Many cannabis users today self-medicate without guidance from healthcare providers.
- Cannabis health products (CHPs) have emerged as a category to describe cannabis products that contain cannabidiol (CBD), which does not cause the psychoactive (i.e., mind-altering) effects associated with products that contain tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). CHPs should not be classified as prescription products as this would make them less accessible than recreational cannabis.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend the federal cannabis regulations so pharmacists and pharmacies are authorized to dispense and distribute medical cannabis.

- Fund pharmacists' services to educate and counsel patients on the use of medical cannabis.
- Follow the drug scheduling model of the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA) for the scheduling of cannabis health products.

## Pharmaceutical Price Compression

- Canadians deserve fair prices for prescription drugs.
- Government-imposed price reductions reduce funding to pharmacies since the current funding model includes mark-ups based on the price of the drug. Pharmacies serving patients who require complex specialty medications are most negatively affected.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consult with pharmacy on drug pricing policy to avoid unintended impacts on pharmacy and patient care.
- Modernize the funding model for pharmacy to more effectively recognize the value of services rendered.

## Pharmaceutical Supply & Drug Shortages



- Drug shortages place burdens on patients and healthcare providers.
- Drug shortages have become a regular occurrence. Pharmacists and pharmacy staff dedicate many hours to overcome shortages, which takes time away from patient care.
- Therapeutic substitution enables pharmacists to address shortages in a timely fashion. However, most provinces have not granted this authority or have limited its application.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish ongoing collaboration between all stakeholders to prevent drug shortages, mitigate harm to patients and develop policies that lead to a more robust, sustainable pharmaceutical supply chain.
- Compensate pharmacies for time spent overcoming drug shortages as part of continuity of care.
- Harmonize therapeutic substitution authority for pharmacists across all provinces.



*Jennifer Deschenes is Director, Communications & Stakeholder Relations, at Neighbourhood Pharmacies. [info@neighbourhoodpharmacies.ca](mailto:info@neighbourhoodpharmacies.ca)*



# All for one, one for all

A conversation with Judy Roberts and Sonal Ejner at Calgary Co-op, member of Neighbourhood Pharmacies



**Judy Roberts**

Senior Director,  
Pharmacy



**Sonal Ejner**

Pharmacy  
Professional Services  
Manager



#### FULL COMPANY NAME

Calgary  
Co-operative  
Association  
Limited

#### ESTABLISHED

1956

#### PHARMACY LOCATIONS

23 in Alberta

#### PHARMACY BANNER

Calgary Co-op  
Pharmacy

#### RETAIL FORMAT

Supermarket  
chain

## What has the pandemic meant for pharmacy?

It has propelled pharmacy forward as a destination for primary care services. Patients have more broadly come to recognize that they can go to their pharmacy for many services. This was a real boon for physicians during the early weeks of the pandemic, and we continue to see elevated pharmacists' prescribing activity even since physicians' offices have reopened. For adult vaccinations, 70 per cent of the prescriptions at Calgary Co-op are now prescribed by our pharmacists.

The pandemic accelerated the uptake of virtual care and this was another opportunity for pharmacy to shine. We were able to launch our virtual platform quickly. Video consults are especially impactful for patients who prefer to stay home or need to self-isolate. Our patient uptake for video consults doubled last month, and referrals from family physicians and specialists to our certified pharmacists has dramatically increased.

## How is Calgary Co-op operationalizing expanded services?

Twelve full-time clinical pharmacists rotate through our pharmacies for appointments with patients. They consult with in-store pharmacists on other patients, provide training and serve as mentors. They truly champion a patient-centred environment.

At our Specialty HUB, three pharmacists operate a centralized concierge service for patients requiring specialty drugs and to coordinate other services. For example, if a physician is looking for diabetes support, he or she sends the referral to the HUB and we match the patient with a clinical pharmacist

Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE) and the pharmacy that's most convenient to them. Pharmacists at our five Centre of Excellence locations onboard, train and educate patients on specialty products.

On the technology side, online appointment booking has freed time for staff. Our central fill pharmacy does all compliance packaging and robotics dispense frequently prescribed medications in high-volume pharmacies.

## How do you collaborate with other healthcare providers?

Advanced training is a core practice.

Our certified pharmacists include CDEs, Tobacco Reduction Educators, Certified Respiratory Educators and those with the ISTM Certificate in Travel Health. We have experts in anticoagulation management, pain management, mental health and more. They regularly collaborate with other healthcare providers as members of a patient's healthcare team. For example, the CDE Greenlist is an elite group of CDE pharmacists who work closely with endocrinologists and complex patients to support ongoing care in the community setting.

As well, our goal is for all of our pharmacists to have additional prescribing authorization (APA).<sup>\*</sup> Currently 95 per cent do, which means they can universally offer prescribing for minor ailments and other conditions and prescribe and administer vaccinations and other injections. We're proud of our pharmacists' ability to competently step in and work with physicians to seamlessly prevent gaps in patient care.

<sup>\*</sup>Pharmacists in Alberta can apply to obtain additional prescribing authorization (APA), which enables them to prescribe any Schedule 1 drug as well as blood products.

# How COVID-19 is marking a new path for pharmacare

The pandemic has put many public policy initiatives on hold—and in the case of a national pharmacare program, it may indelibly change what comes next.



**Economic recovery, pandemic preparedness and public opinion may have set pharmacare on the path toward a fill-the-gaps, mixed-payor approach** rather than the single-payor model put forward by the Liberal government's [Advisory Council](#) in June 2019.

"There's an opportunity, during this kind of holding period, to bring solutions to government ahead of them really reigniting their work on pharmacare," said Jesse Shea, Public Affairs Consultant, Enterprise Canada, at a webinar in January for members of Neighbourhood Pharmacies. "It's an opportunity to implement a mixed-payor solution that is a triple win for government, for industry and for Canadians."

"Now is the time to provide a fresh influence on decisions," agrees Jeff Mehlretter, Consultant, Mehlretter Pharma Consulting. "The pandemic has created an openness to rethink how to proceed." (See [page 17](#) for details on Neighbourhood Pharmacies' position on national pharmacare.)

While decisions around COVID-19 take priority, the pharmacare discussion is also on the table, as evidenced by the New Democratic Party's Bill C-213,

*An Act to enact the Canada Pharmacare Act, which was debated—and defeated—on February 24.*

As well, the COVID-related issues of economic recovery and long-term pandemic preparedness are key new talking points. The past year has been a hard lesson in the importance of a resilient, self-sustaining economy. "The new priority in Ottawa is to build up domestic industry, including pharmaceutical manufacturing. It's about creating a strong healthcare sector in Canada so we are better prepared for the future," noted Katie Heelis, Health Practice Lead, Enterprise Canada, at the January webinar.

The economic contributions of the pharmaceutical industry and retail pharmacy—sectors that are advocating for a mixed-payor model for pharmacare—carry more weight. "Communicating your economic value and footprint in Canada is more important than ever," said Heelis.

## How Canadians feel

To contribute further to the conversation, Neighbourhood Pharmacies enlisted Pollara Strategic

Insights to conduct in-depth public opinion polling about pharmacare in November.

"It's a story of good intentions versus brass tacks," summarized Craig Worden, President, Pollara Strategic Insights, at the webinar. "Canadians would ideally like everyone to have coverage for prescription drugs but, when asked to make choices about healthcare policies, pharmacare trails considerably behind other initiatives and issues as a public priority."

When asked to name the two healthcare priorities most important to them, Canadians scored pharmacare eighth, close behind the similar priority of improved access to medications (Figure 1). However, "both fall far behind higher priorities for Canadians like mental health, senior care and better access to family doctors," said Worden.

The poll dived deeper by asking respondents to consider 13 specific healthcare initiatives, such as improved long-term care and more support for Canadians with opioid addiction. Were they more or less deserving of federal government funding than a new national pharmacare program? All 13 were deemed more deserving, most by a significant majority.

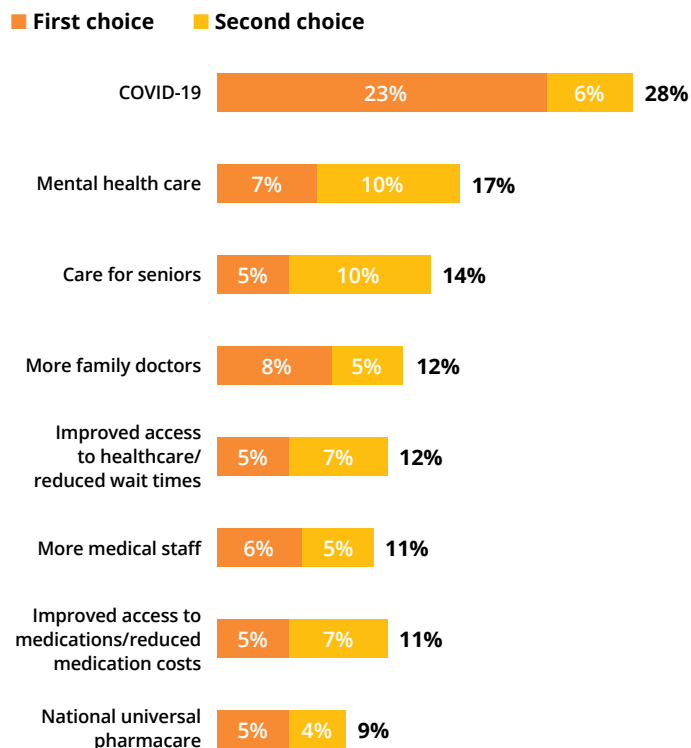
The poll also sought to paint a more accurate picture of the number of Canadians without prescription drug coverage. In November 2020, initial results indicated that 16 per cent did not have coverage and another six per cent did not know. This compared to 14 per cent and six per cent, respectively, in the time period immediately before the start of the pandemic.

However, these numbers do not tell the full story. "The problem is that many Canadians do not know if they have coverage, especially if it's from a government program," noted Worden. To get at this, the poll asked additional questions of respondents in the "do not have" or "do not know" categories to determine their eligibility and awareness of government programs in their jurisdiction (for example, OHIP+ in Ontario).

After reassigning respondents who were eligible for a government program or who indicated they were part of a named government program, Pollara found that the incidence rates for those without coverage significantly decreased, to 10 per cent who did not have coverage and four per cent who did not know (Figure 2). This is a difference of two points from the pre-COVID time period, when the adjusted results were eight per cent without coverage and four per cent who did not know.

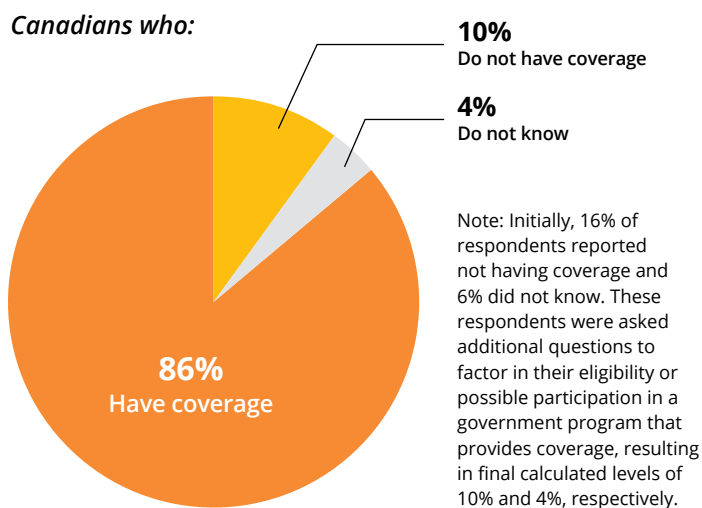
**FIGURE 1** Canadians' top healthcare priorities

*What would you say are the two most important healthcare priorities that deserve additional attention and funding?*



Source: Pollara Strategic Insights, November 2020. N=4,120 adult Canadians. Discrepancies in totals due to rounding.

**FIGURE 2** Prescription Drug Coverage in Canada



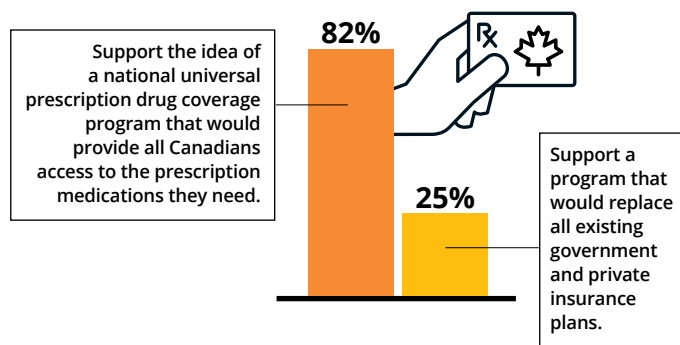
Source: Pollara Strategic Insights, November 2020. N=4,120 adult Canadians.



Among those who reported having prescription drug coverage, 80 per cent were satisfied with their current primary plan, up from 71 per cent in a survey Pollara conducted for Neighbourhood Pharmacies in 2018.

Overall, 82 per cent of Canadians supported the idea of a national universal prescription drug coverage program. However, when asked about specific models for pharmacare, only 25 per cent supported a program

**FIGURE 3** Canadians' support for national pharmacare



Source: Pollara Strategic Insights, November 2020. N=4,120 adult Canadians.

that replaced all existing government and private insurance plans, down from 30 per cent in 2018 (Figure 3). The majority (57 per cent) prefer an approach that focusses on maintaining existing drug plans and providing coverage specifically to those who do not currently have it. Another 17 per cent felt that pharmacare should focus exclusively on Canadians facing extreme circumstances, such as providing coverage for expensive drugs treating rare diseases.

"Public opinion is clear: Canadians are satisfied with what they have and don't want to see a lot of their tax dollars go toward a new pharmacare," says Mehlretter. "Instead, we can improve upon our existing mixed-payor system, and Neighbourhood Pharmacies will continue to present suggestions to government on how to do that."



*Karen Welds is a journalist with more than 25 years of experience covering community pharmacy. [info@neighbourhoodpharmacies.ca](mailto:info@neighbourhoodpharmacies.ca)*

**GROUP JAMP PHARMA**

# Working Together to Put Canadians First

Your partner in building a healthier Canada.

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# A united voice is key to pharmacy's future

**We've heard about the importance of advocating for pharmacy, especially in expanding the role of pharmacists on the healthcare team.**

But as we approach another year of pandemic life in Canada, I've realized just how critical this advocacy will be if we want our profession to thrive in post COVID-19 times.

As a pharmacist practising in Canada for the last 20 years, I've had the opportunity to work as a pharmacy manager and lead multi-store operations for both chains and banners. My role was to support pharmacy teams in building operational efficiencies and optimizing workflow to enable them to spend quality time caring for their patients.

Subsequently, I transitioned to a pharmacy services team with a national responsibility that further expanded my perspective. With high-performing teams working at their maximum potential, I could redirect my focus to the bigger picture; namely, the hurdles preventing the profession as a whole from moving forward. The most common feedback I heard when working with independent pharmacy owners, whether in operations or pharmacy services, was that they felt a better job could be done in advocating for their needs at the government level.

It's not that our provincial associations haven't been doing their part, but until recently, the business of pharmacy and the needs of the pharmacist-owner haven't always been top of mind.

Oftentimes, the average pharmacist-owner isn't even aware of what is being done on their behalf to positively impact their future.

In my current role at McKesson, I'm hoping to help change that. I'm on a team devoted to government relations and advocacy, where bringing a united voice for the profession of pharmacy is part of the mandate.

I'm also proud to be a board member of Neighbourhood Pharmacies, which represents the profession and business of pharmacy across all pharmacy formats, including independent pharmacies. Policymakers and governments prefer a single voice and a strong message, and the Association is equipped to provide that.

Neighbourhood Pharmacies' three regional caucuses inform and disseminate what the Association is doing on behalf of community pharmacies. As a member of all three caucuses and Co-Chair of the Central Regional Caucus, I feel privileged to be able to provide a national lens, which helps nurture collaboration during conversations and the setting of objectives.

If anything, the last year has shown us that pharmacists have the ability and willingness to come together and do whatever it takes to care for patients in need. It has also shown that when we communicate and collaborate, we can influence change that benefits our communities, and our profession.



**Smita Patil,  
RPh, BSc.Pharm**  
BOARD MEMBER  
*Neighbourhood Pharmacy  
Association of Canada*

SENIOR DIRECTOR  
INDUSTRY AFFAIRS  
*McKesson Canada*

“Policymakers and governments prefer a single voice and a strong message, and the Association is equipped to provide that.”



**Neighbourhood  
Pharmacy**  
Association of Canada

Association canadienne  
des pharmacies  
de quartier

The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada advocates for the business of neighbourhood pharmacy and its vital role in sustaining the accessibility, quality and affordability of healthcare for Canadians. Through its members and partners, Neighbourhood Pharmacies is driving innovative solutions through advocacy, networking, research and information services.

**The benefits of membership include:**

- Industry-wide representation with governments
- Exclusive business-building networking events
- Informed and independent information-sharing and analysis
- Real-time industry and regulatory updates

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