



## UNLOCKING PHARMACY'S POTENTIAL AS A HEALTHCARE PARTNER: NEIGHBOURHOOD PHARMACIES FEDERAL ELECTION PLATFORM

Canada's pharmacies have offered accessible, critical support to patients and communities throughout the pandemic and continue to be a partner to public health, primary care providers and governments. This partnership has ensured the continuity of patient care, safeguarding of the medication supply, and providing COVID-19 vaccination and testing services. Our doors have always remained open throughout the course of the pandemic. As we look ahead there are even more opportunities to unlock the potential of pharmacy as a healthcare partner in communities across the country.

The rise and spread of the COVID-19 virus has exposed global weaknesses in healthcare systems and emergency preparedness. From early detection to adequate emergency stockpiles of supplies, Canada, like almost every other nation, was unaware of what was needed to protect our citizens, treat those who contracted the virus, and protect our most vulnerable. Through the challenges faced since early 2020 to today, many components of our healthcare system have remained at the ready to treat and care for Canadians. However, one remains under-utilized: pharmacy.

The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada (Neighbourhood Pharmacies) advocates for pharmacies' role in caring for Canadians. We represent leading pharmacy organizations, including chain, banner, long-term care, grocery chains, specialty pharmacies, and mass merchandisers with pharmacies. We advance healthcare for Canadians by leveraging close to 11,000 pharmacies, in almost every Canadian community, as integral healthcare hubs. Pharmacies typically have extended hours, offering primary care with convenience and accessibility. Designated by government as an essential service, pharmacies and pharmacy teams are critical links in the healthcare system, providing uninterrupted care and coordination with other healthcare providers.

During the pandemic, pharmacies further expanded their role as integrated healthcare hubs in all communities. Pharmacies are the first and often most frequent point of contact patients have with the healthcare system. Pharmacy teams deliver medication therapies, vaccinations, disease management support and innovative solutions in urban, rural, and remote communities.

As we navigate the steady stream of challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and our federal political leaders reflect on the future needs of our healthcare system to support our citizens, treat those in need, and protect our most vulnerable, Neighbourhood Pharmacies wishes to highlight five key areas where we can unlock the pharmacy sector's potential as a healthcare partner:

- 1. Build Immunization Capacity**
- 2. Expand Point-of-Care Testing**
- 3. Enhance Opportunities to Fight the Opioid Crisis**
- 4. Prioritize Medication Coverage for the Uninsured and Underinsured**
- 5. Balance Drug Pricing with Patient-Centred Value**

## CREATING PUBLIC HEALTH CAPACITY

Detecting, monitoring, and preventing infectious and chronic disease are key tenets of public health. We have seen pharmacies offer critical support in the areas of testing and vaccination and know that we are just scratching the surface of pharmacy's potential to increase capacity in many public health areas.

With 95 per cent of Canadians living within five kilometers of one of Canada's 11,000 community pharmacies, our sector is poised to continue stepping up beyond the pandemic.

### 1. Build Immunization Capacity

Evidence demonstrates that convenience is a key driver to vaccine uptake, and the accessibility of community pharmacies provides convenience like no other. The commitment of pharmacy professionals working inside an infrastructure able to distribute, store and administer vaccines paved the way for pharmacy teams to successfully administer a record 5.6 million flu shots to Canadians last year – during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Pharmacies have administered up to 40 per cent of COVID-19 vaccinations in some jurisdictions, reducing the rate of illness and strain on an overwhelmed healthcare system.<sup>2</sup>

We also know that our focus on COVID-19 in the recent past has led to other unintended consequences in routine care, including delayed and missed child and adult routine immunizations. Health system partners will need to work together to help fill these gaps and catch up on delayed vaccinations to ensure Canadians are protected against other vaccine preventable illness. Recent polling indicates 80 per cent of Canadians trust pharmacists to administer vaccines, and 87 per cent would be comfortable receiving routine vaccines in pharmacy.<sup>3</sup> Pharmacists in most jurisdictions already have the scope to administer other recommended vaccinations targeted by jurisdictional immunization programs. However, in many cases, public supply of vaccines is not readily available through community pharmacies. This is creating a barrier in access to these vaccines based on where a patient chooses to receive their vaccine. Governments must ensure equitable access to publicly funded vaccines for both individuals and pharmacies to enable opportunities for pharmacy to support immunization programs across all jurisdictions

### 2. Expand Point-of-Care Testing

Widespread COVID-19 testing continues to be vital to ensure the successful reopening of economies across Canada while the pandemic runs its course. Community pharmacies have leveraged their position as the health system's most accessible touchpoint to offer convenient access to COVID-19 testing in communities to Canadians in where they live and work. As Canada moves beyond the pandemic, community pharmacy must be leveraged to build on this expertise to further support the healthcare system in point-of-care testing activities to detect, monitor and manage acute and chronic diseases. Governments should enable pharmacists to administer point-of-care tests to support optimal medication stewardship for their patients.

### 3. Enhance Opportunities to Fight the Opioid Crisis

Pharmacists are also on the frontlines fighting the opioid crisis. Expanding pharmacists' role in managing opioid therapy by making the exemptions to the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA)* permanent, enabling pharmacists the ability to initiate opioid agonist therapy through a modernization of the CDSA, and improving access to naloxone through community pharmacy further empowers pharmacists to offer solutions to this devastating public health crisis.

## PROMOTING ACCESS TO MEDICATIONS

As the first and most frequent touchpoint to the healthcare system for many Canadians, pharmacy teams have a deep understanding of the concerns of Canadians, particularly as they relate to access to prescription medications needed to maintain a positive quality of life. We are calling on the federal government to promote policies that lead to improved access to medications through a more robust, sustainable pharmaceutical supply chain.

### **4. Prioritize Medication Coverage for the Uninsured and Underinsured**

All Canadians deserve access to the medications they need without financial barriers. Our top priority is, and always will be, maintaining and continually improving access to prescription medications. Research demonstrates that while 82 per cent of those surveyed support a national pharmacare plan, 70 per cent of these supporters are opposed to a program that would replace their existing drug plan. In fact, 80 per cent of those surveyed continued to be satisfied with their existing benefits.<sup>4</sup> Canada's priority should be helping those who do not have coverage and those with insufficient coverage, without disrupting the majority of Canadians who have drug coverage, especially during a global pandemic. By taking this approach, we can minimize unnecessary costs to the taxpayer and allocate money to other critical healthcare priorities.

There must be collaborative work between federal, provincial, and territorial governments to close gaps in coverage while ensuring continuity of coverage for those who have it already. The federal government can demonstrate leadership by establishing national principles to ensure an equitable approach, while maintaining the integrity of existing provincial and private plans. As the frontline distributors of medications, pharmacies should be consulted as integral stakeholders in the design and implementation of a national pharmacare program.

### **5. Balance Drug Pricing with Patient-Centred Value**

Canadians deserve to pay a fair and reasonable price for their prescription drugs. However, reductions in drug prices have unintended impacts on the professional pharmacy services that Canadians rely upon to ensure the timely access, safety, appropriateness, and effectiveness of their therapies.

More work is required to attain clarity on medications impacted by, and the broad economic implications of the proposed reforms to the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board (PMPRB) guidelines and regulations. Our sector must be equipped to manage new prices, minimize supply chain disruption, and determine if a new framework for patient service funding is needed to ensure patient support services to maintain specialized care for patients with complex conditions.

1. Neighbourhood Pharmacies. Data on file
2. Neighbourhood Pharmacies. COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment Summary. August 19, 2021
3. Neighbourhood Pharmacies. Pharmacy's role in routine immunizations. Building on the COVID-19 Experience. Results of public polling. Webinar presentation, July 15, 2021.
4. Pollara Strategic Insights. Pharmacare in Canada. A quantitative study of Canadian attitudes and preferences. November 2020