



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

Association canadienne
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British Columbia 2022 Budget Submission Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Expand the role community pharmacies play in British Columbia's immunization strategy beyond the annual influenza program to increase uptake and create capacity in the public health system.

Recommendation #2: Increase the role of community pharmacies to help manage the opioid overdose crisis through harm reduction.

Recommendation #3: Allow pharmacists to assess and prescribe medications for minor ailments to create capacity in the health care system and improve the quality of care received by British Columbians.

Introduction

The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada (Neighbourhood Pharmacies) is the respected voice and advocate for the business of pharmacy in British Columbia and across Canada. We represent the delivery of care through B.C.'s 1,400 pharmacies, including independent, chain, long-term care, specialty pharmacies, grocery chains and mass merchandisers for pharmacies. Members located in B.C. include London Drugs, Save-On-Foods, Rexall, Shoppers Drug Mart, Pharmasave and many other pharmacy retailers both large and small. Our members fill over 70 per cent of British Columbian prescriptions annually and are home to the most trusted providers of drug therapies, pharmacy-based patient services and innovative healthcare solutions. We work with the B.C. Pharmacy Association and other pharmacy stakeholders to advocate for pharmacy's role as a partner in improving the delivery of care in British Columbia.

Pharmacies in B.C. ensure efficient and effective medication stewardship and continuity of care close to home in communities across the province. Pharmacies and pharmacists provide community-based care and alleviate pressures on other primary care providers. We're typically open for extended hours, and we offer care with the convenience, flexibility, and access that's valued by British Columbians. This accessibility is demonstrated by the fact that Canadians see their pharmacist up to ten times more frequently than they see their own family physician.

Pharmacist interventions correlate with increased vaccination rates and better health outcomes. Our pharmacies are deeply embedded in and committed to the communities they serve. Today, pharmacists are considered the primary providers of medication management services. They are routinely consulted by patients and other healthcare providers for advice on



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dosing, effectiveness, and safety. Pharmacies can serve as a resource for the B.C. government to provide solutions to the issues that are currently facing B.C.'s health care system, including those that are among the most prominent right now, like vaccinations, the opioid overdose crisis, and access to primary care.

Recommendation #1: Expand the role community pharmacies play in British Columbia's immunization strategy beyond the annual influenza program to increase uptake and create capacity in the public health system.

Pharmacies already administer most influenza vaccinations in B.C., and we remain among the most convenient, accessible healthcare providers. B.C. pharmacists were first given authority to provide immunizations in 2009 and have become the largest provider of seasonal influenza vaccine in the province. Last year pharmacists administered over 1.5 million doses of flu vaccine, over 70 per cent of all the flu shots in the province.

We are delighted with the province's recent decision to begin distributing influenza vaccines through the pharmacy sector's wholesale distribution partners. Our proven and sophisticated distribution systems will ensure proper cold chain management and enable on-demand pharmacy ordering of vaccine, leading to more efficient delivery, cost savings and fewer wasted doses. This year, community pharmacies will receive influenza vaccine directly from pharmaceutical distributors and in future years community immunizers, including physicians and nurse practitioners will receive publicly funded vaccines through the pharmacy sector's wholesale distribution partners.

Community pharmacists also played a significant role in the province's fight against COVID-19 by delivering AstraZeneca vaccines earlier this year, and we're working with government right now to expand our role to administer mRNA vaccines by Pfizer and Moderna. We also look forward to playing a role delivering third doses and booster vaccines when those are made available.

In addition to flu and COVID-19 vaccines, pharmacists are also authorized to administer other routine vaccines such as those for HPV, pneumonia, and shingles. Unfortunately, COVID-19 meant that many British Columbians missed one or more routine vaccinations for themselves or their children last year. Recent research found that up to 23 per cent of British Columbians are likely to have missed or delayed a routine immunization due to COVID-19. The health system will need to work together to catch up on delayed vaccinations to ensure that British Columbians are protected against other vaccine preventable illnesses. Immunizations for infections like shingles, pneumonia and HPV can be administered through pharmacy, creating capacity in the public health system while simultaneously reducing shortages and waste.



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As one of the most accessible and trusted healthcare providers, pharmacy professionals have the education and skills to support public health vaccination efforts, if enabled to, by administering publicly funded vaccines to eligible individuals. Community pharmacies are in neighbourhoods around the province and often are open longer hours than other businesses. This means British Columbians will be able to attend appointments at a time and place that is convenient for them. Public opinion research validates that an overwhelming majority of British Columbians value the convenience and flexibility of receiving immunizations at a location close to home, such as their community pharmacy.

Pharmacy professionals have demonstrated their ability to strengthen public health initiatives through participation in other vaccine rollouts. The success of these immunization programs at pharmacies reflects the evolving patient preferences to access vaccines through pharmacies. A Canadian Pharmacists Association survey found that more than 8 in 10 Canadians felt comfortable getting their own routine non-COVID-19 vaccines from a pharmacy or getting their children vaccinated at a pharmacy. The role of pharmacy as a key immunization partner is going to help build capacity in these efforts. That will be more important than ever as we come out of this pandemic. We'll continue to work with government to seek out other opportunities to increase our role in the province's vaccination strategy.

Recommendation #2: Increase the role of community pharmacies to help manage the opioid overdose crisis through harm reduction.

More than 7,000 British Columbians have died as a result of illicit drug use since 2016. These deaths have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 1,700 people died due to drug overdoses in 2020 alone; a 74 per cent increase over 2019. Many opioid-associated deaths involve unregulated fentanyl; however, prescription opioids remain a key cause of opioid overdoses. Over 75 per cent of individuals who experience opioid toxicity received an opioid prescription in the last 3 years. In the early phases of the pandemic, B.C. pharmacists were granted expanded authorities to support the continuity of care through being able to manage prescriptions for people who are using opioids. This authority is especially important in those situations where people might not have had access to their regular doctor for a variety of reasons.

Naloxone is a key tool in opioid harm reduction. Naloxone can quickly reverse the effects of an overdose from opioids such as heroin, fentanyl, morphine, and codeine. It is available without a prescription in B.C. and comes in both injectable and nasal spray formulations. B.C., like many other provinces, offers a Take Home Naloxone (THN) program. This allows registered sites to distribute free life-saving injectable naloxone kits to individuals who might be at risk of overdosing or witnessing someone overdosing. All participating sites are also expected to provide training on overdose prevention and naloxone use to kit recipients. There are over



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1,300 THN sites in B.C., including more than 720 pharmacies. In addition, non-participating pharmacies may also sell naloxone kits to individuals.

Despite the availability of these life-saving kits, a great deal of uncertainty surrounding how and when to administer naloxone exist throughout the province. In 2017, the Ambulance Paramedics of B.C. raised concerns that naloxone kits were being misused by illicit substance users and dealers, subsequently further endangering themselves and other citizens. Perceived stigma associated with use is also an issue. Even with the expansion of eligible populations for naloxone kits, certain groups, including patients with prescribed opioids, are still less likely to be offered naloxone.

By optimizing naloxone distribution through pharmacy, we can ensure this important tool is able to better reduce the number of British Columbians dying of overdoses. For example, the current naloxone consensus guidelines suggest that all patients taking opioids should be offered a naloxone kit. Recommending that pharmacists offer Take Home Naloxone kits to all patients picking up a prescription would ensure this important tool is more widely available and accessible when needed. And ensuring that pharmacists could offer training on how to use THN kits would increase confidence and ensure they were used when needed to help save lives.

Recommendation #3: Allow pharmacists to assess and prescribe medications for minor ailments to create capacity in the health care system and improve the quality of care received by British Columbians.

Authorizing pharmacists to assess and prescribe for minor ailments in the community where patients live and work will expand access to primary care, reduce pressures on doctors and increase convenience for patients. Common, or minor, ailments do not require lab or blood tests for diagnosis and are usually short-term, self-limiting conditions that can be managed with minimal treatment or self-care. They include conditions such as back pain, insect bites, diaper rash, indigestion or heartburn, nasal congestion, and headaches.

Pharmacists in B.C. already have the training and expertise to effectively assess and recommend medications for these short-term and generally self-limiting conditions. Expanding pharmacists' authority to prescribe medications for minor ailments could divert people from swamped emergency rooms, reduce pressures on doctor's offices, improve rural access to primary care, and result in convenience for busy families.

Pharmacists in B.C. are trusted health providers and have already been granted additional authority in recent years to better use their full range of knowledge and skills to help alleviate access pressures in the primary care system. Pharmacies are the primary provider of prescription medications that British Columbians rely on, but their role today goes well beyond



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just dispensing, into newer services such as medication reviews, adapting and renewing prescriptions, and administering injections.

Most other Canadian provinces now allow their pharmacists to assess these minor ailments and prescribe therapies for appropriate conditions. Unfortunately, B.C. lags behind most provinces in the number of expanded scope practice services pharmacists are authorized to perform and in the number of pharmacist services funded by the government.

Pharmacy is more than ready and willing to take the next step to help ensure that every British Columbian has the opportunity to receive timely, expert advice and treatment for common ailments from pharmacies.

Conclusion

As we've seen throughout this pandemic, pharmacy serves as a key partner in B.C.'s health system. Because of our skills, our accessibility, and our strong relationships with the patients that we serve in our communities, we feel we have a tremendous role to play in the care of British Columbians. We hope that you will recommend to government that the role of pharmacy in primary care and public health can be expanded because of this. As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, we're nimble, and we're ready to serve to lessen the burden on B.C.'s health care system.

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