

Sandra Hanna
CEO
Neighbourhood Pharmacies



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

Association canadienne
**des pharmacies
de quartier**

By Sandra Hanna

Each new year offers a time for reflection. There's also a readiness to shake off the old and leap optimistically toward a promising future. I've never felt so optimistic about the possibilities on the horizon for pharmacy, especially when reflecting on our accomplishments over last year.

For our association, 2021 was a year of remarkable dedication, hard-earned progress and incredible achievement. We successfully advocated for the deployment of COVID vaccines in pharmacies nationwide, helping bring vaccines to over 12 million Canadians. This milestone, and other shining examples of pharmacy's leadership, are celebrated in our free digital magazine, the Neighbourhood Pharmacy Gazette, and I invite you to subscribe at neighbourhoodpharmacies.ca.

Neighbourhood Pharmacies

As a national, not-for-profit trade association, Neighbourhood Pharmacies delivers thought leadership and solutions in public health, primary care and policy development. We represent care delivery through nearly 11,000 pharmacies, where pharmacy teams serve as health care hubs, creating capacity in communities and health systems. Our association represents pharmacy organizations with varied business models, including chain, banner, grocery, specialty, long-term care, and mass merchandisers with pharmacies. We leverage the diverse and collective strength of our members and partners, including the pharmaceutical supply chain and manufacturers, working toward the common policy objective of improving access to health care.

With a distinct, pan-Canadian perspective, Neighbourhood Pharmacies is the voice of the pharmacy business, representing our member organizations as a trusted partner to government. Our purpose is to advocate for pharmacy's potential to improve Canadians' health and contribute to a robust, resilient health system.

**Unlocking
pharmacy's potential**

The pandemic is exposing vulnerabilities in health care systems worldwide, and Canada is no exception. Pharmacy has mobilized rapidly in communi-

cines in pharmacy.

Acting on this issue, we launched a digital campaign, oneinfour.ca, to garner public support for an expanded role for pharmacy in delivering routine immunizations. The mobilization of pharmacy for routine vaccinations — for example, against HPV and shingles — is a natural segue given pharmacy's achievements in influenza and COVID. We are carrying forward this successful grassroots campaign into 2022 to continue raising public awareness and driving policy change.

Pharmacies have also supported the administration and distribution of COVID tests in many provinces, supporting a safe, successful economic recovery. Beyond COVID, pharmacy should be leveraged for its expertise in point-of-care testing to detect, monitor and manage acute and chronic diseases. Our advocacy will increasingly focus on government enabling pharmacy professionals to administer point-of-care tests that support the important role of pharmacy teams in medication stewardship.

Opioid overdoses and deaths have continued to escalate through the pandemic and cannot be decoupled from the growing mental health challenges and gaps in care in Canada. Expanding access to harm-reduction initiatives like naloxone in community pharmacies and identifying a greater role for community pharmacy to support patients' mental health is an emerging area of advocacy for our association.

Access to medications

As the debate over national pharmacare continues in Canada, we continue to urge government to prioritize medication coverage for the uninsured and underinsured. As frontline distributors of medications, pharmacy is an integral stakeholder in designing and implementing a pharmacare program that ensures all Canadians have access to the medicines they need. Leading up to the 2021 federal election, we deployed a digital campaign educating Canadians on the risks of a single-payor national pharmacare model poses to the coverage most Canadians enjoy. We continue to

engage federal and provincial stakeholders on the implementation of a pharmacare model that would prioritize those most in need.

Reforms to the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board (PMPRB) guidelines and regulations continue to be discussed federally. We engaged the PMPRB and the federal government, on behalf of our members and partners, to highlight unintended downstream consequences to pharmaceutical supply chain partners, including pharmacies and pharmaceutical distributors. We continue to urge government to pause the reforms until such a time that assurances can be provided to stakeholders on the downstream impacts of the changes, especially in light of the current pandemic climate that has demonstrated the importance of health and life sciences industries and supply chain partners.

Cannabis

The anticipated Fall 2021 review of the Cannabis Act has, like other policy priorities, been delayed by the pandemic, but access to medical cannabis and cannabis health products through pharmacies remains a priority for us. As medication management experts, pharmacists are ideally positioned to help improve access to cannabis for medical purposes and ensure patient safety. Moving into 2022, our cannabis position, stakeholder strategy and key partnerships are solid foundations for our advocacy on this issue. We will be advocating for pharmacies to sell cannabis health products without a medical authorization so that Canadians can have access to medication experts, to encourage further adoption of the legal market and fill the growing demand for cannabis health products. Over the coming year, we will target key opinion leaders and policy makers, educating them on this issue and highlighting pharmacy's role.

Pan-Canadian advocacy

Canada's 2021 federal election saw Justin Trudeau's Liberals gain a third mandate and second consecutive minority government. Last October, a new cabinet was announced, including a new minister of health, Jean-Yves Duclos, and a new minister of mental health and addictions, Carolyn Bennett. Canadians look to the federal government to steer us toward recovery, and health care will be a critical test. COVID's impact will drive discussions for policy makers in years to come. Our association has zeroed in on fundamental policy and decision points as focal areas for our advocacy to support health system resilience and benefit Canadians. While Canadians are proud of our public health care system, there are new opportunities for public-private col-



Sandra Hanna

laborations to help build more resilient health systems.

**Resilient health systems
are the future**

As governments everywhere start to look beyond this current pandemic and turn their attention to rebuilding the economy and enhancing the strength and capacity of the health care system, pharmacy has an integral role to play in offering solutions to the challenges ahead. Over the past two years, we have demonstrated that pharmacy has the flexibility and the footprint to respond to public health crises. The pandemic has also revealed that there is a much-needed investment in preventing burnout, supporting mental health and building resilient health care teams. Investing in pharmacy helps build a resilient health system that benefits all Canadians and enables better protection against future pandemics.

We are thrilled that our 2022-2024 strategic plan, Investing in Access, is well under way. We launched it at a pivotal juncture in the global health landscape, with pharmacy's role more significant than ever. As a result of the pandemic, we are also more engaged with international stakeholders, disruptors and trendsetters, gaining and sharing key learnings across sectors and across the globe. It is a priority for us to continue to think innovatively. We're identifying current and upcoming trends in the pharmacy sector to effectively plan for the future while tackling the steady stream of challenges in the current state that is completely focused on the pandemic.

I'm confident 2022 will be a year where pharmacy is increasingly established as a partner to government, delivering high-quality health care to patients who trust and depend on us. Neighbourhood Pharmacies will continue advancing pharmacy's business interests, solidifying pharmacy's role as a health care hub, and shaping a policy landscape that enables pharmacies to meet Canadians where they're at in their health care journey. We're leaping into 2022 with purpose, clarity and the firm resolve for pharmacy's value to be recognized and our potential realized.

ties across the country, creating public health and primary care capacity as system resources are overwhelmed. Pharmacies are the first and most frequent point of contact people have with the health care system, and 95% of Canadians live within five kilometers of a pharmacy.

Our advocacy and partnerships with federal and provincial stakeholders and governments aims to unlock pharmacy's potential as a health care provider.

**Public health and
primary care**

Canada's community pharmacies have been instrumental in the deployment of COVID vaccinations, leveraging their convenient access and relationships in their communities. We partnered with This is Our Shot Canada, a national movement to support vaccine efforts across the country. To date, pharmacies have successfully administered over 50% of COVID vaccinations in some jurisdictions, a record 5.6 million flu shots in 2020, and even more expected by the end of the 2021 flu season.

However, with the focus on COVID, unintended consequences have emerged for child and adult routine immunizations. In fact, one in four Canadians missed or is unsure if they missed routine vaccinations for themselves or their child and 70% of these could have been avoided by better access to providers who could administer these vaccines. We also partnered with a grassroots coalition of academics and public health experts at 19 to Zero to conduct public opinion polling on this concerning issue. Eighty percent of Canadians trust pharmacists to administer vaccines, and 87% would be comfortable receiving routine vac-

