



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

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Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada

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The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada's (Neighbourhood Pharmacies) members 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. Budget 2022 could be the catalyst for strengthening public health capacity country-wide, through this underutilized resource: pharmacy.

The rise and spread of the COVID-19 virus have exposed global weaknesses in healthcare systems and emergency preparedness. 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. As we look ahead and evaluate the role that pharmacy has played in mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on the healthcare system, it is clear that more work can be done.

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 Canadians have with the healthcare system. Pharmacy teams deliver medication therapies, vaccinations, disease management support (including testing and screening) and innovative solutions in urban, rural, remote, and First Nations 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 four key areas where federal government can unlock the pharmacy sector's potential as a healthcare partner:**

1. Build Immunization Capacity
2. Expand Point-of-Care Testing
3. Prioritize Medication Coverage for the Uninsured and Underinsured
4. 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. With 95 per cent of Canadians living within five kilometres of one of Canada's 11,000 community pharmacies, our sector is poised to continue stepping up beyond the pandemic. **We have seen pharmacies offer critical support in the areas of testing and vaccination and urge the federal**

government to leverage community pharmacy’s additional potential to increase capacity in public health:

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.

Pharmacies have administered over 17 million COVID-19 vaccines across the country, reducing the rate of illness and strain on an overwhelmed healthcare system. Published evidence shows that pharmacy-based immunization services can lead to increased vaccination coverage rates, and community pharmacies have been a critical tool in reaching Canada’s COVID-19 vaccination goals.

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. [Recent polling](#) suggests that as many as one in four adults and up to 35% of children in the country may have missed a routine vaccination. Millions of Canadians may now be at risk for vaccine preventable illnesses such as pneumonia, HPV, measles, or shingles. Approximately 70% of these missed immunizations could have been avoided with access to a vaccinating healthcare provider. 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.

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

As the country recovers from COVID-19, the need for appropriate allocation of thinly-spread health human resources has never been greater. Technological advances now allow many monitoring, screening and diagnostic tests to be administered at “point-of-care”. With laboratories and public health testing centres operating at maximum capacity, the ability of the pharmacy channel to administer certain point-of-care tests can help unlock health system capacity, supporting disease management and screening.

Enabling pharmacists to use an expanded range of point-of-care tests (POCTs) will reduce health system capacity pressures and red tape by minimizing the number of touch points patients have with the health system, while hastening their access to appropriate treatment. Patients may visit their community pharmacy up to 10 times more often than their primary care physician. Pharmacists can monitor patients’ disease status conveniently while the patient is in the pharmacy, both reducing the need for other healthcare interactions while monitoring disease progress.

Pharmacies have leveraged their position as the health system’s most accessible care provider to offer convenient access to COVID-19 testing to Canadians in communities where they live and work. Pharmacy POCT services will provide patients with timely access to results and treatment and

therefore uncomplicate the patient experience, while minimizing the need for multiple health system interactions.

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.

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:**

3. 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.

For this reason, Neighbourhood Pharmacies has engaged extensively on the work the government is doing to create a healthier and safer Canada including the development of a national pharmacare program and introduction of changes to the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board (PMPRB) Regulations and Guidelines.

The priority of governments at both the federal, provincial and territorial levels 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.

Additionally, as the government looks at all aspects of pharmacare and drug coverage in Canada, we must ensure that a strategy for rare diseases continues.

It is our view that a rare disease strategy should not only preserve the level of care and service that currently exists, but also extend it to those who lack sufficient coverage, or do not have coverage at all through their current drug plan. To best support Canadians and to ensure access to the medications they need, we need to maintain and build on the current drug coverage millions of Canadians currently receive through private and public drug plans. With more comprehensive formularies, private drug plans are seen to provide more options for their participants, as well as more timely access to medicines. It is important that policy decisions and new programs do not put this comprehensive coverage at risk.

While our advocacy around a national pharmacare plan seeks to ensure that we are building on the extensive coverage Canadians currently have, we strongly believe that a strategy for rare diseases is an entirely separate issue that deserves a more drastic intervention.

4. 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.

These impacts can range from disruptions and challenges for patient support programs and services which are designed to provide personalized patient care and support, anticipating the needs of patients with complex medication therapy, to ensure patients receive the greatest value out of the medicines they are prescribed. There is almost no government funded support for the medication management of these patients, beyond a basic dispensing fee and a maximum allowable upcharge.

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.

Summary

Throughout the pandemic, community pharmacy has demonstrated leadership in responding to and protecting Canadians' healthcare needs. We can do more. We urge the government to continue collaborating with the community pharmacy sector to:

1. Build Immunization Capacity
2. Expand Point-of-Care Testing
3. Prioritize Medication Coverage for the Uninsured and Underinsured
4. Balance Drug Pricing with Patient-Centred Value

Action in these key areas will **leverage community pharmacy's additional potential to increase capacity in public health and protect Canadians' access to medications through a more robust, sustainable pharmaceutical supply chain.** Investing in pharmacy is investing in access. We look forward to further working with the Government and other health partners to support Canadians' healthcare needs.