



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

Association canadienne
**des pharmacies
de quartier**

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HESA Opening Statement

Sandra Hanna CEO, Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada

Mr. Chair, Honourable Members, thank you for the opportunity to present today.

My name is Sandra Hanna. I am first and foremost a practicing pharmacist who has had the privilege to work alongside my health system partners and governments in our collective efforts to meet the needs of Canadians as we weather the storm of the COVID-19 pandemic over the past two years.

I am also the CEO of the Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada - a not for profit trade association that represents 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 are the first and most frequent point of contact patients have with the healthcare system, and 95 per cent of Canadians live within 5 kilometers of a community pharmacy. Canada's community pharmacies dispense over 750 million prescriptions annually to Canadians; deliver the majority of influenza vaccinations each year; and in the past 12 months alone, they have administered over 18 million COVID vaccinations to Canadians, up to 40 per cent of all COVID vaccinations in some jurisdictions, reducing the rate of illness and strain on an overwhelmed healthcare system.

No matter the challenge, our doors have always remained open.

As we continue to navigate the steady stream of challenges caused by the 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, there are even more opportunities to unlock the potential of pharmacy as a healthcare partner in communities across the country.

Pharmacies and the robust supply chain that serves them have demonstrated unwavering commitment to Canadians and health systems throughout the pandemic as critical partners in the timely delivery of products and services – in mitigating supply chain challenges and in helping Canadians to access vaccines and tests conveniently in virtually every community across the country. Without our services, medicines simply cannot get to Canadians.

Our top priority is, and always will be, maintaining and continually improving access to prescription medications for Canadians. While there are differences in opinions on a national pharmacare program or pricing reform for Patented Medicines, we can all agree that all Canadian should have access to the medicines they need.

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. Canada's priority must be helping those who do not have coverage and those with insufficient coverage, without disrupting the majority of Canadians who have drug coverage. By taking this approach, we can minimize unnecessary costs to the taxpayer and allocate money to other critical healthcare priorities. 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.

The government has previously cited COVID-19 as a primary reason for delaying the implementation of the PMPRB's regulatory changes. And while we continue to see economies re-open, we can all agree that the pandemic is not yet behind us. 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. We are concerned that the impact of the proposed PMPRB regulations and guidelines on patient programs will be severe, and that the implementation of the regulations during the pandemic will add undue burden on pharmacists and pharmacy teams as they navigate the financial impact of these changes on pharmacy operations.

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 and primary care areas. We know that there is a backlog of healthcare services – surgeries, chronic disease diagnoses and immunizations that we must all work together to catch up on, and this requires that every healthcare provider work to their full scope and capacity to improve access to care for Canadians.

With pharmacies across the country now participating in the distribution of COVID tests, and many conducting tests on-site, pharmacies are uniquely suited to support the health system with disease screening, and prescribing and dispensing of antivirals such as Paxlovid™.

Pharmacies can create capacity in public health as we catch up on the one in four Canadian adults (and up to 35% of children) who have missed or delayed a routine immunization due to the pandemic. Evidence demonstrates that convenience is a key driver to vaccine uptake, and the accessibility of community pharmacies provides convenience like no other.

There is a lot of work ahead of us to not only alleviate strains the COVID-19 pandemic placed on our health care system, but also to ensure that equity and equal access to services are delivered to underrepresented communities from coast to coast to coast. Neighbourhood Pharmacies and our members remain committed to working with the federal government and all stakeholders to leverage the expertise of our teams to create capacity and fill gaps in care.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today, and I would be pleased to answer any of your questions.