



**Neighbourhood  
Pharmacy**  
Association of Canada

Association canadienne  
**des pharmacies  
de quartier**

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## **Government of British Columbia Budget 2023 Consultation**

**Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada**

**June 24, 2022**

**Submission to the Select Standing Committee on  
Finance and Government Services  
(EXPANDED VERSION)**



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## Summary of Recommendations

*Recommendation #1:* Enable community pharmacies to play a greater role in British Columbia's immunization strategy by ensuring additional routine vaccines for preventable illnesses are included in existing pharmaceutical distribution systems.

*Recommendation #2:* 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) represents 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 and many other pharmacy retailers both large and small. Our members 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.

British Columbia's 1,400 community pharmacies are deeply embedded in and committed to the communities they serve. 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.

As the B.C. health system works to manage the pressures of a growing and aging population, pharmacies provide an opportunity to be a primary care partner. With many British Columbians unable to find a family doctor, pharmacy can be another option for patients seeking specific types of primary care. We encourage the government to consider viable ways to enable and fund these critical services. Investing in pharmacy will be a wise investment in sustainable healthcare delivery and patient access for the future.



***Recommendation #1: Enable community pharmacies to play a greater role in British Columbia's immunization strategy by ensuring additional routine vaccines for preventable illnesses are included in existing pharmaceutical distribution systems.***

**The issue:** Immunization rates in B.C. for vaccine preventable illnesses such as pneumonia, HPV, measles, or shingles are well short of National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) targets. Some regions of B.C. have seen declines in childhood immunization rates of as much as 40 per cent in recent years due to COVID-19. School based HPV vaccination programs saw a decline of 67 per cent compared to prior years. Outbreaks of diseases like measles are expected to increase because of global immunization being interrupted.<sup>i</sup>

**Pharmacy as a solution:** Pharmacists are already authorized to administer these and other routine vaccines, but the health system is not optimized to make full use of this ability. The province has robust medication and vaccine distribution systems serving community pharmacy, and these can be further leveraged to deliver more routine vaccines in a cost effective way. Community pharmacy has demonstrated it can safely and efficiently administer publicly funded influenza vaccines and COVID-19 vaccines to British Columbians. Community pharmacy already provides 80 per cent of all seasonal influenza injections in the province, and the B.C. Government has recently increased its reliance on pharmacy to provide COVID-19 vaccines, especially much needed booster shots. As one of the most convenient, accessible healthcare providers, community pharmacies can expand their role in routine immunizations to help catch up on delayed vaccinations to ensure that British Columbians are protected against vaccine-preventable illnesses.

**Benefits to British Columbians**

Expanding the role community pharmacies play in British Columbia's immunization strategy can:

- **Increase health care capacity:** Many essential healthcare workers, especially nurses and doctors, are burned out and in short supply. Community pharmacies have the benefit of leveraging their entire pharmacy team, including pharmacy technicians, students and potentially other health care providers, to provide vaccinations, adding much needed capacity.
- **Prevent new disease outbreaks:** Increasing pharmacy involvement to catch-up on missed vaccinations will help mitigate new disease outbreaks and keep British Columbians safe and healthy.
- **Provide equitable vaccine access:** Pharmacies are located in communities across the province making vaccine access more equitable to all.
- **Increase vaccine uptake:** More than 57 per cent of Canadians would immediately accept a routine immunization at their local pharmacy, citing convenience – including proximity to home, extended hours, ability to walk-in, and ability to ask questions – as the key driver. Evidence also shows that pharmacy-based immunization services can lead to increased vaccination uptake.



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**Recommendation #2: 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.**

**The issue:** Even with the B.C. Government's investments in primary care, British Columbians still struggle to get timely access to health professionals to assess less serious health conditions often called common or minor ailments. These are defined as self-limiting conditions like insect bites, diaper rash, indigestion or heartburn, nasal congestion, and headaches. These minor ailments do not require lab or blood tests for diagnosis and can often resolve on their own or with either "over-the-counter" products or prescription medication.

**Pharmacy as the solution:** 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. B.C. pharmacists already often assess patients' symptoms, recommend potential therapy and refer patients to their prescriber if prescription medication is determined to be the most optimal treatment. 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. With the announcement by Ontario this spring, all other Canadian provinces now allow their pharmacists to assess these minor ailments and prescribe appropriate therapies for certain conditions.

To be aligned with other similar pharmacy services (including those in other provinces where a minor ailments remuneration framework exists) we've proposed a professional services fee of \$20 per assessment. In Saskatchewan, where a well-established minor ailments assessment and prescribing program exists, it has been estimated that approximately 15,000 pharmacy minor ailments consultations take place annually. Extrapolating that to the population of British Columbia suggests pharmacies might carry out approximately 60,000 minor ailments assessments per year at an initial annual cost of \$1.2 million.

Enabling pharmacies to treat patients in their community is a cost-effective model with significant potential return on investment. It has been estimated that pharmacist-administered minor ailments programs in Saskatchewan have a potential positive return of \$2.53 for every \$1 invested.<sup>ii</sup> An Alberta study demonstrated that the management of uncomplicated urinary tract infections by pharmacists in that province led to quicker and more efficient access to care.<sup>iii</sup> A University of Waterloo study published last year found that pharmacist prescribing in Ontario could save the province \$42 million a year just on upper respiratory tract infections, contact dermatitis and conjunctivitis alone.<sup>iv</sup>



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## **Benefits to British Columbians**

Allowing pharmacists to assess and prescribe medications for minor ailments will:

- **Reduce pressure on primary care and emergency rooms:** Dealing with minor ailments can take up to 10-20 per cent of physicians' time, who are already overburdened. Triaging minor ailments to pharmacies can redistribute the burden of care and minimize unnecessary ER visits by patients who can't access primary care.
- **Provide timely access to convenient care:** British Columbians who need in-person care for the treatment of common ailment often wait days for an appointment with a primary care provider or hours in a walk-in clinic or an emergency department, which may require time off work. Pharmacies are open and accessible on evenings and weekends, and are ready to provide timely access to care, in patients' local communities.
- **Uncomplicate the patient journey:** British Columbians with minor ailments can be assessed at a pharmacy in their community, at a time that is convenient for them, have treatment prescribed and receive their medication all in one place. This means faster service, fewer demands on the healthcare system and better access overall to care.
- **Support better health outcomes:** Pharmacists are the healthcare system's experts on medication therapy and as such are fully competent to identify appropriate medication therapy for all minor ailments. Limiting pharmacy interventions to non-prescription recommendation's may not be in the patients' best interest and often necessitates multiple touchpoints with the healthcare system, which can be costly and inconvenient for the patient.

## **Conclusion**

The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. We look forward to working with the province to expand the role of community pharmacy in primary care to reduce the burden on B.C.'s health care system.

## **Submitted by:**

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