

Creating Capacity in Public Health

Neighbourhood Pharmacies' Position:

- Pharmacies are a preferred destination for immunization services. Pharmacists should be enabled to administer all vaccines and government funding should be made available for public health vaccines administered in pharmacies.
- As a partner in delivering healthcare solutions, government can trust pharmacies and the efficient pharmaceutical distribution system to facilitate the storage, distribution, dispensing, and administration of vaccines. Governments and health authorities should enable use of the pharmaceutical distribution system for vaccines in all provinces.
- Enabling pharmacist-administered point of care testing will support disease screening initiatives, and support chronic disease management. By providing pharmacists with the ability to order and access lab tests, pharmacists can also ensure patients' therapies are monitored in real-time for effectiveness and potential toxicities.
- Pharmacists are on the frontlines fighting the opioid crisis. Expanding pharmacists' role in managing opioid therapy, initiating opioid dependence therapy, and naloxone administration further enables pharmacists to offer solutions to this devastating public health crisis.



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With approximately 11,500 pharmacies and more than 35,000 pharmacy professionals practicing in almost every community in Canada, community pharmacies are vital to local healthcare systems.[1] Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacists and pharmacy operators demonstrate resilience, an unwavering commitment to patients, and an unmatched infrastructure of accessibility. Pharmacy has proven its effectiveness on the frontlines of public health.

We have seen significant success with pharmacist-administered influenza programs. We know pharmacists can provide even greater support in delivering vaccines and public health initiatives. Pharmacies are now the preferred destination for many immunization services. In 2019, approximately 50 per cent of Canadians received the influenza vaccine at their community pharmacy, and this number is growing every year.[2] In the 2020/2021 season, 5.2 million influenza vaccines were administered by pharmacy - a new record amount. Throughout the pandemic, pharmacy continuously provided close to a quarter of all COVID-19 vaccines administered across the country, reaching over 90% in some jurisdictions [3]. Pharmacies can play a key role in supporting the provision and administration of other routinely recommended publicly vaccines for adults and children. [3?]

Pharmacies are well-positioned to lead the vaccination effort. More than one in four adults missed a routine vaccination for themselves or their child.[4] Many school-based public health programs were delayed or paused due to public health capacity. Ninety per cent of Canadians trust the quality of care pharmacists provide, and 80 per cent of parents support pharmacists administering vaccinations for communicable diseases.[5] As a designated Essential Service, pharmacies will continue operating in a crisis and are well-equipped to provide vaccines on schedule, without interruption.

Pharmacies are served by a sophisticated and highly reliable pharmaceutical distribution system. Most pharmacies receive daily deliveries, and in urban areas, deliveries can be as often as twice per day. Frequent delivery means that pharmacies hold less inventory and can respond quickly to changes in patient demand. Provinces that have chosen to use the pharmaceutical distribution system for the influenza vaccine experience significant (up to 50 per cent) reductions in waste[6], a critical consideration in the COVID-19 vaccination program where global demand initially outpaced supply.



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Pharmacies' participation in point of care or laboratory-based testing reduces pressures on public health and primary care and offers patients a trusted, convenient healthcare option within the community. Despite their willingness, expertise, and extensive training, pharmacists often feel helpless to support their patients and are obliged to refer them to another healthcare professional. The referral process takes time away from physicians and other healthcare providers. It increases patients' risk of exposing others to illness or having their condition worsen as they travel to multiple sites seeking care. Maximizing pharmacists' ability to deliver the services they have the training and expertise to provide ensures patients access high-quality care more quickly and delivers better overall value to our healthcare system. We urge government to enable pharmacies' enhanced role in testing and make the necessary investments to ensure pharmacists' fair compensation for these services.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacies and pharmacists acted under the temporary legislative exemptions to Section 56 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to ensure patients receive an uninterrupted supply of their opioid therapy. Pharmacists' support in this area reduces the risk of patients experiencing extreme withdrawal. It also discourages patients from seeking illicit sources while providing the necessary monitoring and follow-up to mitigate potential abuse or diversion risks. Government's goal should be to make these changes permanent by including pharmacists as practitioners under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

Pharmacists routinely rank among the most trusted healthcare providers and are critical in promoting wellness, dispelling misinformation, and providing education on public health initiatives. They are an essential part of healthcare and should be funded adequately to account for the time, materials, and resources required to deliver their services. Pharmacies are instrumental players in public health. Leveraging pharmacies' accessibility and the relationships pharmacists have with their patients will reduce the burden on a public health system already under stress.

Public Health Solutions Delivered by Pharmacy

Pharmacist interventions correlate with better health outcomes, increased vaccination rates, and improved return on investment for every dollar spent. They use their expertise and clinical skills to manage and mitigate health concerns while preserving public health resources. Pharmacy's role in supporting public health is often unrealized and underreported. Pharmacies deliver public health solutions such as:

- Education
- Health promotion
- Immunization services
- Smoking cessation services
- Chronic disease management
- Disease screening and prevention
- Opioid management and dependence therapy

For every dollar spent on pharmacy services, the estimated direct return on investment ranges from \$2.30 for an advanced medication review, \$9.10 for smoking cessation to \$72 for pneumococcal vaccination.[7]



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References:

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