

Neighbourhood Pharmacy Gazette

SUMMER 2026

 **INSIGHTS. ADVOCACY. HEALTHIER CANADIANS.**

A publication of the Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada

A critical piece

**NEW RESEARCH ESTABLISHES
PHARMACY'S ECONOMIC
FOOTPRINT IN CANADA**



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Neighbourhood Pharmacy Gazette

INSIGHTS. ADVOCACY. HEALTHIER CANADIANS.

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Message received, loud and clear

When planning our cover story a few months ago, we agreed to bring in some outside voices to comment on our new report, *The Economic Footprint of Canada's Pharmacy Sector: Fuelling Health and Local Economies*. Since Neighbourhood Pharmacies had commissioned the research for the report, we didn't want to come across as tooting our own horn, so to speak. Turns out, we could be making a lot more noise.

Without exception, the people we interviewed at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) and the Coalition for a Better Future expressed surprise by the size of pharmacy's contributions. "It has the profile of a core economic sector. Not one that is on the periphery," said Marvin Cruz at CFIB.

Economically speaking, pharmacy compares with sectors that currently get more attention and support from governments. When we consider as well that healthy people drive a healthy economy, and pharmacy's contributions to healthcare in Canada are steadily growing, it's clear that pharmacy lifts well above its weight as an economic driver.

Pharmacy's impact is further amplified in rural and remote communities. Not only do pharmacies employ a solid number of local residents, but they also directly contribute to the resilience of that community's infrastructure. As noted in the Coalition for a Better

Future's 2026 report, the economic importance of rural and small-town communities is growing. Attracting workers to these communities requires investments in infrastructure, including healthcare. Often, the local pharmacy is the most accessible—and sometimes only—point of access to healthcare.

The research findings exceeded our expectations. But I keep going back to the fact that the first three thought leaders we approached outside of pharmacy were all initially surprised by its findings. That reaction struck a chord.

While we've made significant progress proving the value of community pharmacy as a healthcare hub in recent years, our work is cut out for us to show the sector's commensurate values as an economic engine and as a community builder. As geopolitical tensions reforge economies in Canada and around the world, getting that messaging out now is more important than ever.

I'm reminded of Neighbourhood Pharmacies' recent policy roundtable about Canada's new Biomanufacturing and Life Sciences Strategy, when I also spoke of pharmacy's unrecognized strengths. Community pharmacy is conspicuous in its absence from the strategy, despite its vital role as the last mile in the pharmaceutical supply chain.

On so many fronts, community pharmacy makes Canada stronger. We can be proud of that—and perhaps more importantly, we can be loud about that. 🌈



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“Economically speaking, pharmacy compares with sectors that currently get more attention and support from governments.”

A critical piece

New research establishes pharmacy's economic footprint in Canada

Proof of community pharmacy's value in healthcare steadily grows. Now we have proof of the sector's value to the economy as well.

New research by Signal49 reveals that the pharmacy sector supports close to 273,000 jobs across Canada and generates a total of \$22.9 billion in gross domestic product (GDP) and \$6.3 billion in tax revenues when direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts are considered.

"Pharmacy's financial footprint is comparable to industries that traditionally receive far greater

attention from policymakers and economists," says Sandra Hanna, CEO of Neighbourhood Pharmacies, which commissioned the research. "As the federal government and provincial governments face unprecedented economic challenges, this research puts pharmacy on the map as an important collaborator for economic growth."

Signal49, a Canadian-based applied research organization specializing in economic, health, and public policy analysis, assessed the pharmacy sector's total economic impact by measuring its direct, indirect,

and induced contributions, including how pharmacy spending flows through supply chains and supports household consumption across the economy. Its resulting report, *The Economic Footprint of Canada's Pharmacy Sector: Fuelling Health and Local Economies*, states that pharmacy's direct GDP contribution is comparable to industries such as petroleum refining, plastics manufacturing and aerospace manufacturing.

The sector directly employs more than 193,000 Canadians, comparable to the engineering and child care sectors. Its labour income accounts for 61 per cent of its GDP contribution, well ahead of the national all-industry average of 51 per cent. The sector's GDP multiplier is estimated to be 1.2, meaning that for every dollar of direct output, the economy generates \$1.20 in total GDP—an additional \$0.20 beyond the value of that output.

"Most people think of pharmacies as just stores where they pick up their medication, but they're actually a really important and major economic sector," says Anne-Lore Fraikin, Signal49's Associate Director, Economic Research. "These data points are quite powerful and clearly convey the message that the pharmacy sector is an important one."

Eddy Nason, Director, Health, at Signal49, says the research also highlights pharmacy's "uniquely dichotomous" contributions.

"It's a business and a significant economic driver and

it's also a frontline healthcare service operating at a time of major upheaval in primary care," he explains. "That means pharmacy isn't just an economic engine—it's an economic engine with purpose."

"Healthy people drive a healthy economy," summarizes Hanna. "Pharmacy is uniquely positioned to contribute significantly to both sides of this equation."

An economic powerhouse

Liam MacDonald, Director of Policy and Government Relations at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, says he was surprised by the sheer size of pharmacy's economic contribution after reading the report. "We don't always think of the indirect benefits of pharmacies, in particular the significant supply chains

and associated economic activity they support," he says.

Beyond dispensing medications and providing healthcare services, pharmacies generate economic activity as employers and supply-chain drivers in

communities across the country. MacDonald says the report helps quantify those ripple effects in a way that is rarely discussed.

Marvin Cruz, Senior Director of Research, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, agrees. "I was a little surprised by how critical of a part community pharmacy plays in terms of the economic ecosystem," he says. "It has the profile of a core economic sector. Not one that is on the periphery."

Cruz was also struck by how closely the findings aligned with his organization's own work examining the [economic impact of local businesses](#).

Cruz and MacDonald agree that the report's data reinforces the close relationship between healthcare access and economic prosperity, particularly in communities where pharmacies have increasingly become a more readily available point of access to care. "Pharmacies are particularly important in rural areas, and from a health perspective, improving access to medicines and primary care matters because a healthy population is essential for a strong economy," says MacDonald.

“Pharmacy isn’t just an economic engine—it’s an economic engine with purpose.”

\$22.9 billion
Pharmacies' total contribution to Canada's gross domestic product in 2024

Source: Signal49 Research. *The Economic Footprint of Canada's Pharmacy Sector: Fuelling Health and Local Economies*, July 2026.



Nathan Longeau, Senior Manager, Pharmacy Business Development with Federated Co-operatives Limited, which supports 70 Co-op pharmacies in urban and rural Western Canada, can vouch for that. “Whether it’s employment of residents, servicing the patient base and really providing that accessibility of care, our pharmacies play a huge role.”

He adds that pharmacies’ local impacts are particularly important at a time when many communities are struggling to attract new businesses, healthcare professionals and maintain essential services.

Pharmacy’s rural advantage

Nowhere is pharmacy’s dual role as a healthcare provider and economic contributor more evident than in rural Canada. While rural communities account for a relatively small share of Canada’s population, they rely heavily on the pharmacy sector for both access to healthcare and employment. According to the report, more than one in every 100 rural residents works in pharmacy.

Several factors make pharmacists particularly valuable in rural communities. Research shows they often see patients between 1.5 and 10 times more frequently than family physicians and they tend to remain in rural practice longer—an average of 15 years compared with 11 years for family physicians.

At a time when governments across Canada are

searching for ways to improve access to care while maintaining sustainable healthcare spending, this report should prompt policymakers to take a broader view of pharmacy’s role, says the Honourable Anne McLellan, former

federal Minister of Health and current Co-chair of the Coalition for a Better Future.

“I don’t think if someone had asked me some years ago, I would have necessarily thought of pharmacies as an integral part of primary healthcare,” she

says. Today, however, she believes that perception is changing as pharmacists take on expanded responsibilities across the country. “I think people started to change their views of what pharmacies and pharmacists could offer when provinces started to broaden the scope of practice for pharmacists.”

That expanded role takes on even more significance when explored against the broader economic importance of rural Canada. In the Coalition’s 2026 report, *Time to Execute: Canada’s Crucible Moment*, rural and small-town communities are identified as central to Canada’s future growth. They generate more than one-quarter of the country’s economic output and support many of the industries expected to drive future prosperity—including agriculture, energy, mining and forestry.

For McLellan, pharmacies will become increasingly important as those communities grow.

“As transportation infrastructure is built through this vast nation, we’re going to put unnecessary pressure on the well-being of those communities and the people who live in them unless we get ahead of the infrastructure needs,” she says. Accessible healthcare is a key part of that infrastructure.

The Coalition argues that attracting workers to rural communities requires investments not only in roads and transportation networks but also in the social infrastructure that supports families, including healthcare.

While roughly 18 per cent of Canadians live in rural communities, those communities are served by a much smaller share of the country’s physicians. In that

“People started to change their views of what pharmacies and pharmacists could offer when provinces started to broaden the scope of practice for pharmacists.”



273,000
Jobs supported
by Canada’s
pharmacy sector

Source: Signal49 Research. The Economic Footprint of Canada’s Pharmacy Sector: Fuelling Health and Local Economies. July 2026.



\$6.3 billion

Tax revenues generated by the pharmacy sector in 2024

Source: Signal49 Research. *The Economic Footprint of Canada's Pharmacy Sector: Fuelling Health and Local Economies*. July 2026.

environment, pharmacies often become one of the most accessible entry points into the healthcare system.

Longeau sees that reality firsthand in the Co-op pharmacies. "In rural communities, the pharmacist is sometimes the only healthcare professional available," he says. "If patients and residents are able to access healthcare where they live, in their communities, that is very important to them and it's important for a productive workforce and a productive economy."

As scope of practice continuously expands, Co-op pharmacies have added clinical services to help fill local care gaps. Pharmacists are increasingly providing primary care services such as assessing and prescribing for minor ailments, point-of-care testing for strep throat and ear infections and vaccination services. "Pharmacies are increasingly functioning as critical community infrastructure in areas where access to primary care may be limited," says Longeau.

This aligns with one of the report's broader conclusions that pharmacists practising to their full scope can help address gaps in primary care, particularly in underserved communities. By providing chronic disease management, prescription renewals and treatment for minor ailments among other services, pharmacies improve access to care while reducing pressure on overburdened—and more costly—emergency departments, urgent care clinics and physicians' offices.

Yet access to care is only part of the story.

In many rural communities, pharmacies are not only key employers, but they are also important contributors to the broader community infrastructure. Their presence helps attract and retain residents and their products and services support aging in place.

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Another pat on the back!

Neighbourhood Pharmacies is proud to announce that the *Gazette* has picked up a National Magazines Award: B2B for the second year in a row



Our cover story in the Winter 2025 edition, "30 years strong," was a finalist in the category of Best Special Report.

The awards are presented annually by the National Media Awards Foundation to promote excellence in journalism. We're honoured to be recognized for the integrity of our content, in support of Neighbourhood Pharmacies' efforts in education, thought leadership and advocacy.



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"Community pharmacies contribute to the resilience of regions that are increasingly expected to play a larger role in Canada's economic growth," says Hanna.

The hard work ahead

On the surface, community pharmacy delivers a coveted triple threat as a driver of economic growth from coast to coast to coast: as an employer, a healthcare provider, and a builder of community resilience in rural and remote areas. However, dig deeper and the challenges—and contradictions—emerge.

"It is somewhat ironic that pharmacy has the potential to help governments achieve their economic agenda on multiple fronts, yet the business of pharmacy itself is under threat—often due to government policies or outdated regulations," says Hanna. "Governments see the value in pharmacist

services and are investing in those, but the community pharmacy infrastructure is overlooked and undervalued. Policymakers will

get better value when they stop looking at pharmacy's core funding for dispensing as a cost and instead see it as an investment in protecting pharmacy's footprint, which supports local economies and makes healthcare more accessible."

“Community pharmacies contribute to the resilience of regions that are increasingly expected to play a larger role in Canada's economic growth.”

"Pharmacists have historically been the most accessible healthcare provider, but in order for that to continue, we have to ensure that the pharmacy business is sustainable," agrees Longeau.

Workforce shortages, particularly in rural and remote communities, are also a growing challenge (see the *Gazette's Spring edition* for more on the pharmacy workforce). The Signal49 report cites workforce

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More than 1 in 100

Rural Canadians employed in the pharmacy sector

Source: Signal49 Research. *The Economic Footprint of Canada's Pharmacy Sector: Fuelling Health and Local Economies*. July 2026.

projections showing that rural pharmacy is the only health profession in Canada where the supply-demand gap is expected to widen, increasing by 14 per cent between 2022 and 2029. At the same time, expanded scopes of practice are placing more new demands on pharmacy teams.

Many organizations are looking to technology to help pharmacists spend more time on patient care. For example, a central fill pharmacy has improved efficiencies and freed pharmacists' time in Co-op pharmacies. "The goal is to allow the pharmacist to dedicate more time to providing patient care," says Longeau.

But he cautions that operational efficiencies can only go so far. "My worry is that the expanding scope of practice and the remuneration models for those professional services will not balance with the increasing margin pressures that we see on the traditional dispensing side of the business."

For McLellan, conversations about sustainability must answer questions around capacity. As pharmacies take on a larger role in healthcare,

the role of government is to ensure they have the resources to do so. "If you want them integrated into the continuum of healthcare, then they have to be compensated in accordance with other healthcare professionals," she says.

Of course, proof of value is both the entry point and the ultimate goal of improved collaborations between government and the pharmacy sector.

"For years, we've known anecdotally the value pharmacies bring to their communities. This report

finally gives us the data to demonstrate that value in economic terms. The opportunity now is to ensure that policymakers, healthcare leaders and Canadians fully understand what pharmacy contributes—and what more it could contribute in the future," says Hanna. 🌈

“For years, we’ve known anecdotally the value pharmacies bring to their communities. This report finally gives us the data to demonstrate that value in economic terms.”



Rosalind Stefanac is a Toronto-based freelance writer and editor, specializing in community pharmacy and Canadian healthcare issues.



Pharmacy's footprint at a glance

Download Neighbourhood Pharmacies' infographic for a snapshot of community pharmacy's impact as economic engines. The infographic includes a provincial breakdown of the sector by number of pharmacies, contribution to the gross domestic product and number of jobs supported.

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Why technician managers make sense

A quiet but transformative shift is taking place in pharmacy practice in Nova Scotia.

The province's new *Regulated Health Professions Act*, implemented June 2025, states that pharmacy technicians are no longer confined to supportive roles defined by supervision and delegation. They are stepping into a new era of autonomy that includes eligibility to serve as pharmacy managers, in accordance with pharmacy licensure requirements. Nova Scotia is the first province to do this.

This evolution challenges traditional assumptions about hierarchy in healthcare. More importantly, it reflects a broader, more modern truth: effective teams are built on competence, collaboration and shared accountability—not rigid chains of command.

Driven by competence

At the heart of this change is competency-based practice. Pharmacy technicians, like pharmacists, are now authorized to perform activities for which they have been educated, trained and certified, without requiring oversight from another professional. This is not a dilution of standards; rather, it represents a clearer alignment between responsibility and demonstrated ability. Each professional is accountable for their own scope; a scope defined not by title, but by competence.

One of the most notable developments is that pharmacy technicians are now eligible to serve as pharmacy managers in Nova Scotia. This change introduces a valuable opportunity to rethink operational leadership. Managing a pharmacy involves a wide range of responsibilities: workflow optimization, inventory control, regulatory compliance, staffing coordination and quality assurance. Experienced pharmacy technicians often excel in these areas, having spent years immersed in the technical and logistical backbone of pharmacy operations.

By empowering technicians to take on management roles, owners can better leverage the strengths of their teams. Pharmacists, who remain responsible for clinical decision-making and the appropriateness of pre-

scriptions and therapies, are freed to focus more fully on patient care. This division of responsibilities can enhance both efficiency and outcomes, allowing each professional to work at the top of their scope.

Critically, this shift does *not* remove the pharmacist from the pharmacy environment. Regulations still require that a pharmacist be present whenever the pharmacy is open to the public. Clinical authority remains firmly within the pharmacist's domain. What has changed is the recognition that operational leadership does not inherently require clinical authority.

Collective accountability

For some, the idea of a technician managing a pharmacist may feel counterintuitive. Healthcare has long been structured around hierarchies, with decisions flowing from the top down. But modern healthcare increasingly relies on interdisciplinary collaboration, where each team member contributes their expertise within a shared framework of accountability. In this context, management is less about authority and more about coordination.

A technician serving as a pharmacy manager does not “override” a pharmacist's clinical judgment. Instead, they ensure that the environment in which that judgment is exercised is efficient, compliant and safe. Meanwhile, pharmacists continue to lead on clinical matters. The relationship becomes one of mutual respect and complementary roles, rather than hierarchical control.

This collaborative model is reinforced by ongoing professional obligations that apply to all pharmacy staff. Every pharmacy professional—technician or pharmacist—has a duty to report concerns about competence and a duty to intervene if they observe an error.



These shared responsibilities create a culture of safety that transcends job titles. In such an environment, leadership is distributed, and accountability is collective.

Another important aspect of the new framework is that individual scope of practice remains limited to personal competence. Not all technicians will have the same skills or experience, and the same is true for pharmacists. This reinforces the idea that leadership should be based on capability, not assumption.

Transformative leadership

For pharmacy owners, this flexibility can be transformative. It allows for more strategic staffing models, improved workflow design and greater job satisfaction. Technicians who see a clear pathway to leadership may be more engaged and invested in their work. Pharmacists can deepen their focus on patient-centered services such as medication reviews, chronic disease management, and prescribing where authorized.

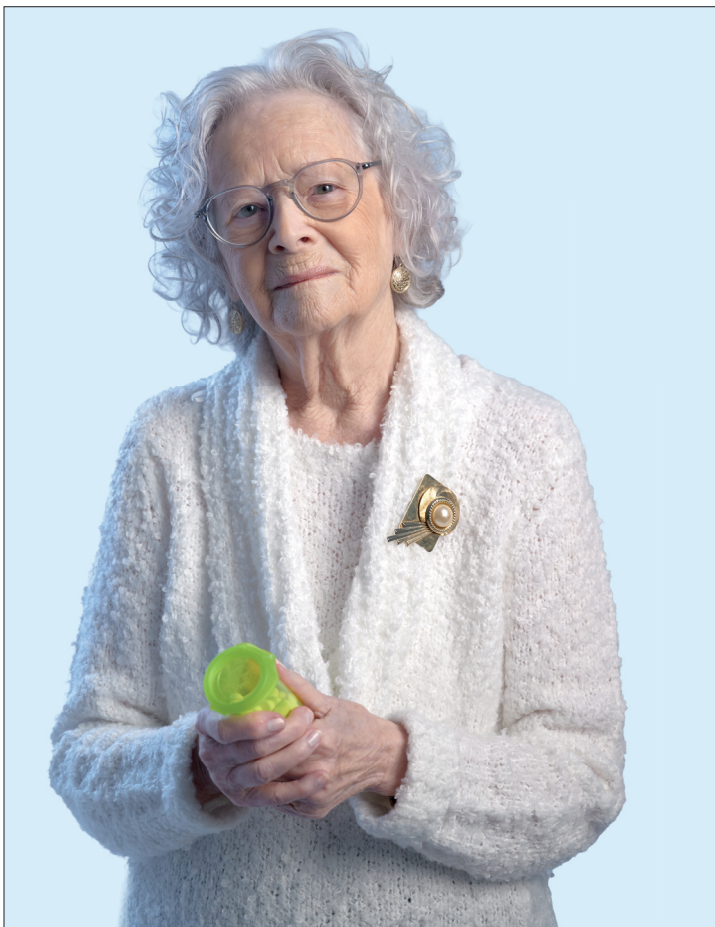
Ultimately, the move to allow pharmacy technicians

to serve as managers is not about redefining who is “in charge.” It is about redefining how leadership functions within a complex, high-stakes environment. Hierarchies can be useful, but they are not always the best way to organize a team. In pharmacy, where safety, accuracy, and patient care are paramount, a collaborative, competency-driven model offers an effective path forward.

Change often brings uncertainty, but it also brings opportunity. By embracing this new framework, the pharmacy profession can evolve into a more flexible, efficient and team-oriented system. Where every professional is empowered to contribute their best, and where leadership is defined not by title, but by trust, skill and shared purpose. 🌈



Krista Faulkenham, pharmacy technician, is the Pharmacy Manager of the Bridgewater Guardian pharmacy in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia.



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Shaping the next era of pharmacy business



Community pharmacy in Canada is poised to capitalize on a new era of curated wellness services anchored by pharmacists' expertise. However, time—and workforce resilience—are of the essence, highlighted the two keynote speakers at Neighbourhood Pharmacies' Pharmacy EXPO 2026 in Vancouver, B.C., in May.

While the pharmacy sector is facing structural shifts driven by consumer health behavior, margin pressures and new competitors, "Canada is uniquely positioned to leverage trust in pharmacists to capture growth," said Joseph Magnacca, a CEO, board member and investor with more than 30 years of experience as a retail executive in Canada and the U.S., most of it in community pharmacy.

Magnacca shared global examples as both cautionary tales as well as success stories for pharmacies transitioning to a wellness-focused business model. Today's top wellness categories include weight management driven by the use of glucagon-like peptide-1 agonists (GLP-1s); clinical skincare; functional nutrition; sleep; mental wellness and women's health.

The GLP-1 market is projected to reach \$120 billion globally by 2028. "The ecosystem around

GLP1—supplements for nausea, protein, and side effect management—is where pharmacies can expand," noted Magnacca. "[Pharmacies] can become the natural GLP-1 support hub through curated products, pharmacist consultation, and regimen-based selling."

Magnacca advised reducing inventory in other categories to free space for the wellness leaders, noting that shelf productivity increases by 25 to 40 per cent. The goal is to attract customers who may not have a prescription but are seeking wellness solutions and currently going to specialty retailers or social media influencers.

"Educating pharmacists to become community educators and content creators" is key to creating a unique, trusted destination experience, he said. To free pharmacists' time, Magnacca emphasized shifting more of the dispensing workload to pharmacy technicians and technology.



Joseph Magnacca

Strategic resilience

Workforce resilience is also essential, stated leadership psychologist and executive coach Marie-Hélène Pelletier.

While that may be self-evident to counter the high rates of burnout among healthcare providers today, Pelletier urged the audience to make equal efforts for corporate leaders. "Resilience is essential to the leadership infrastructure," she said.

And it must be embedded in business strategy and operational plans to be effective across all organizational levels. "Linking resilience with business strategy ensures it is prioritized alongside growth and innovation."

For example, while artificial intelligence (AI) promises to improve efficiencies and work-life balance, many employees feel anxiety. "Recognizing the emotional and cognitive impact of technology-driven change is vital for leadership support," said Pelletier.

That recognition includes addressing ethical challenges or concerns that arise when tasks are

delegated to technology. "This underscores the need for deliberate leadership to uphold values amid technological shifts," said Pelletier.

Embracing agility and normalizing uncertainty are among the core principles of resilience. Pelletier outlined a learning agility framework composed of five parts: mental agility; people agility (including psychological safety); change agility (including self-care planning); results agility; and self- and team-awareness.

Pharmacy EXPO 2026 brought together a record number of pharmacy leaders, operators, sector partners, manufacturers, and healthcare stakeholders from across Canada. In addition to the keynote presentations and one-on-one meetings, EXPO featured an exhibit hall showcasing innovative products and services. Check out the [photo gallery](#) (password NPAC05) and [wrap-up video](#). 🌈



Marie-Hélène Pelletier

Proof of pharmacy's value to the Canadian economy

As governments prioritize economic growth and improved healthcare access, community pharmacy uniquely delivers on both fronts.



Get your copy of *The Economic Footprint of Canada's Pharmacy Sector: Fuelling Health and Local Economies*.



An infographic is also available.



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Congratulations to this year's award winners

Neighbourhood Pharmacies is pleased to recognize four pharmacy leaders for their outstanding contributions to the advancement of pharmacy, including the first two recipients of the inaugural Sector Catalyst Award.

1 Len Marks Pharmacy Advancement Award

Bruce Winston's career in pharmacy has spanned more than four decades. Currently the Senior Director, Pharmacy Advocacy and Professional Affairs at Neighbourly Pharmacy, he consistently goes above and beyond to advocate for the profession, advance pharmacy practice, mentor future leaders, and champion the sustainability of community pharmacy across Canada. The Len Marks Award is Neighbourhood Pharmacies' highest recognition for legacy leadership and honours individuals whose sustained contributions have advanced the position of pharmacy in healthcare and strengthened the pharmacy business sector.

2 Distinguished Partner of the Year Award

Michel Robidoux, President and General Manager of Sandoz Canada, is this year's Distinguished Partner of the Year. The award honours a Neighbourhood Pharmacies Partner who demonstrates exceptional commitment to advancing the Association's initiatives and contributing to the growth and success of community pharmacy in Canada. Under Robidoux's leadership, Sandoz Canada has become one of the country's leading pharmaceutical companies and a longstanding supporter of pharmacy. As an active contributor to the Association, he has played an important role in strengthening collaboration and innovation across the sector.

3 Sector Catalyst Award

Alicia Matthews-Kent, Chief Operating Officer at Neighbourly Pharmacy, and Jason Wentzell, President and CEO of Extend Pharmacy Group, are the inaugural recipients of the Sector Catalyst Award. The award recognizes trailblazing leaders whose bold thinking, innovation and business leadership are accelerating change within the pharmacy sector.



Alicia Matthews-Kent (left) and Rita Winn of Neighbourly Pharmacy congratulate their colleague, Bruce Winston.



Neighbourhood Pharmacies' CEO Sandra Hanna with Michel Robidoux, Sandoz Canada.



Inaugural Sector Catalyst Award winners Alicia Matthews-Kent and Jason Wentzell with Neighbourhood Pharmacies' Past Chair Marie-Claude Vézina.

Matthews-Kent is actively advancing patient care, operational excellence and access to pharmacy services in rural and underserved communities. Jason Wentzell is the founder of Extend Pharmacy and the Extend Cancer Pharmacy Network, innovative care models that improve support and outcomes for oncology patients.

Unlocking pharmacy's value in supply chain

One key player is missing from Canada's new **Biomanufacturing and Life Sciences Strategy**: pharmacy.

Released in October 2025, the strategy seeks to rebuild a competitive and resilient domestic biomanufacturing and life sciences sector. Its priorities include emergency readiness and national security, access to medications when disruption occurs in the supply chain, real-time supply chain monitoring and real-world data collection.

Yet the strategy doesn't consider the role of the country's 12,500+ community pharmacies, the last mile of the pharmaceutical sector.

"Pharmacy is already well positioned to contribute to these priorities of the new federal policy, but it's not sufficiently integrated into the systems, policies, technologies, and funding models that shape those priorities," says Sandra Hanna, CEO of Neighbourhood Pharmacies.

The new federal strategy was the topic of discussion during Neighbourhood Pharmacies' policy roundtable discussion at Pharmacy EXPO 2026 in June in Vancouver, B.C. One call to action from participating Members and Partners was the development of a Pharmacy Life Sciences Strategy to clearly connect pharmacy's strengths and capabilities with the priorities of the federal strategy.

"We need to give voice to pharmacy's secret but not-so-secret strengths," says Hanna. "Pharmacy is a proven partner in crisis-response. Its accessibility and footprint and ability to scale and mobilize got us through the pandemic and ensured access to lifesaving vaccines. As we speak, pharmacies are making sure Canadians get their medications despite wildfires and floods."

And daily throughout Canada, pharmacies mitigate the impact of drug shortages. "Expanded scope of practice and a sophisticated distribution network—and often, simply working with the pharmacy down the



Jeff Mehlretter, Mehlretter Pharma Consulting, and Rita Egan, AstraZeneca, were among the participants at Neighbourhood Pharmacies' policy roundtable discussion.

street—significantly lessen the impact of hundreds of drug shortages every day," says Hanna.

Pan-Canadian standardization was another recommendation from roundtable participants to optimize and integrate pharmacy's contributions to the life sciences sector and more broadly to healthcare systems. The areas for national standardization include scope of practice, documentation, access to records and information-sharing.

Pharmacy needs to be at the table to ensure that its value as critical infrastructure is appropriately recognized, utilized and funded, emphasizes Hanna. "When we protect the footprint of pharmacies in communities across Canada, we protect pharmaceutical sovereignty, medication access and national security. We protect Canadians." 🌈



Help us be confident in the driver's seat

If you remember what it's like to learn how to drive a car, you know how uncertain things can be when you first get behind the wheel. You've got the knowledge to follow the rules, but events around you are moving quickly; road signs suddenly seem to blare out messages that can be difficult to process in real time. But with focus and perseverance, you realize that doubt is part of the learning process, and not every sign is going to change the way you drive.

This is the experience of a pharmacy intern. Steadfast guidance from pharmacy owners, managers and preceptors is paramount, yet it can be challenging for them to understand the perspective of new practitioners. Here are some ways you can best support their experience at your site.

Walk the talk

The PharmD program is highly clinical with a focus on direct patient care. Pharmacists' scope of services is catching up to what we are trained to do, but too often interns are met with outdated practice models at practice sites. This sends the message that our expectations are unrealistic, despite our training.

On the flip side, pharmacy interns report the best experiences—and can make the biggest contributions—when working with preceptors who hold additional qualifications, such as a Certified Diabetes Educator or someone certified in travel health. The empowerment of preceptors in turn empowers those they educate, and inspires the workplace.

How are we doing?

There are no exams during placements, which can be jarring for validation-seeking students. As interns, we must measure our growth in less concrete ways—but how? Interns rely on their preceptors and the team to let them know they are on the right track.

The key to providing good feedback is honesty and encouragement. It can be intimidating for interns when



they make mistakes, yet they must make them as part of the learning process. Candid and empathetic feedback allows us to assess our successes and failures in a constructive way, and motivates us to challenge ourselves under watchful eyes.

More than pharmacy

This generation values work-life balance. Our career is only one part of who we are. As well, we value collaboration with other healthcare practitioners to objectively promote better patient care. Supporting and prioritizing these values foster an environment conducive to optimal learning for interns and the pharmacy team alike. If the goal is to invest in the next generation of pharmacists, considering how they see the world is highly pragmatic and beneficial.

Interning is all about gaining confidence and integrating into a professional culture. Pharmacy owners and managers play a huge part in how that experience unfolds. Precepting is truly a noble gift to those who are becoming independent for the first time in their professional journeys. Let's continue to empower each other as we all grow, no matter our stage of life. 🌈



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Striking a balance: dollars versus volume

Inflation-led growth and strength in health and beauty in Canadian drugstores are offset by value pressure, channel switching and shifting shopper dynamics.

Over the rolling 52 weeks ending the first quarter of 2026, Canadian drugstores¹ delivered moderate dollar growth but continued to face structural volume pressure. They captured 10.0 per cent of total fast-moving consumer goods' (FMCGs') tracked dollar sales and dollars were up 2.6 per cent year over year; however, they are underperforming the broader market, which grew 3.6 per cent.

Growth remains heavily inflation-driven, as average prices in drugstores increased 5.4 per cent, well ahead of the total market (3.2 per cent). Meanwhile, volume declined by 2.8 per cent. This imbalance highlights growing consumer resistance to higher prices and ongoing shopping behaviour shifts toward lower-priced retail channels for everyday essentials.

Performance varies meaningfully by region. The West and Maritimes show the strongest momentum, while Ontario and Québec continue to experience more pronounced volume declines. These regional differences point to uneven competitive intensity and consumer price sensitivity across the country.

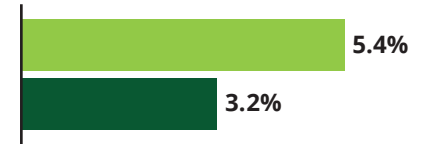
Category performance reinforces drugstores' core strength in health and beauty (H&B). The drugstore channel accounts for nearly 55 per cent of total H&B sales, with solid dollar growth across body care, cosmetics, hair care and OTC, despite modest softness in volume. In contrast, food and non-grocery remain challenged, as higher relative pricing limits competitiveness versus grocery and mass channels. Underdeveloped areas, such as baby care, continue to lose share.

Shoppers are clearly prioritising savings. Promotional intensity is rising, private label is gaining traction (especially on volume), and loyalty is increasingly fluid as consumers switch retailers and brands. Drugstore shoppers skew to older, smaller households. While

Changes in sales and volume, drugstores compared to total retail market

■ Drugstores ■ Total retail market

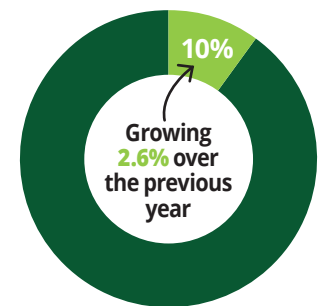
Dollar sales



Volume



Drugstores' share of sales of fast-moving consumer goods



Source: NIQ Canada, National Grocery, Mass Merchandiser and Drug Store, 52 weeks ending March 28, 2026

Top 3 fastest-growing and declining categories in drugstores by sales dollars

Fastest-growing categories

1. Smoking cessation	81%
2. Energy and nutrition products	25%
3. Extreme energy drinks	20%

Declining categories

1. Juices and drinks (refrigerated)	-16%
2. Pizza and subs (frozen)	-13%
3. Cough remedies	-13%

Source: NIQ Canada, National Drug Store, 52 weeks ending March 28, 2026

online penetration (currently 10.6 per cent of sales) is growing rapidly, in line with total FMCG trends, the channel has yet to offset in-store volume declines.

Overall, drugstore performance reflects a channel at an inflection point: resilient in H&B, but under pressure to sharpen value, pricing and engagement to restore sustainable growth.

Opportunities for retailers

• Double down on H&B as the growth engine

Retailers should prioritise space, innovation, services and omnichannel activation in H&B departments. Leveraging online, loyalty and exclusives can help offset continued softness in traffic and food volumes.

• Rebuild value perception to stabilise volume

Inflation-led growth is masking declines in unit demand. Expanding private label, refining price architecture, and using more targeted, personalized promotions will be critical to slow shopper defection.

Opportunities for manufacturers

• Win where drugstores are relevant and credible

Health, wellness, beauty and functional categories continue to outperform and align with drugstores' shopper base. Manufacturers should prioritise innovation, premiumization and drug-exclusive assortments in these areas to capture resilient demand despite overall volume pressure.

• Adapt to a more price-sensitive environment

Ongoing volume declines signal rising shopper resistance to price increases. Manufacturers will need sharper price-pack strategies, more disciplined promotional support and selective participation in private label partnerships to protect distribution, relevance and share within the drugstore channel. 🌈

Reference: 1. NIQ captures data from participating chain, franchise and banner-program drugstores across Canada.



Carman Allison is Vice President, Industry Insights, at NIQ Canada.

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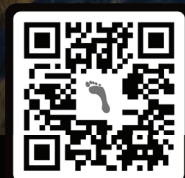


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Compounding a vision

The patient had been unable to renew her usual hormone replacement therapy (HRT) because of a drug shortage. She almost lost hope until her physician referred her to Compound Creations. After consulting with the prescriber, the pharmacist compounded a topical alternative that allowed the patient to continue treatment without interruption.

“Since then, she’s become my regular customer,” says Elham Khalkhali, owner of Compound Creations. “This is an example of how we can easily find a seamless solution for patients. This is my vision for my compounding pharmacy.”

When Khalkhali opened Compound Creations in Oshawa, Ontario, in 2024, she wasn’t simply launching another community pharmacy. After more than two decades in the profession, she wanted to create a practice built around personalized care and customized medications. She wanted to work more closely with both patients and other healthcare providers, including hospitals.

Khalkhali provides non-sterile compounding services for patients requiring alternatives to commercially available medications, with a focus on areas such as HRT, pediatric formulations, pain management, dermatology preparations and medications affected by ongoing drug shortages.

She is also carving out a niche supporting children with autism and sensory sensitivities, who often struggle with medication taste, texture or dosage forms.

To build her business, Khalkhali meets directly with physicians, hospital clinicians and other local healthcare providers, such as midwives and dentists, to explain the role and services of a compounding pharmacy. She hosts educational events and invests heavily in social media



Elham Khalkhali opened Compound Creations in 2024 in Oshawa, Ontario

and digital outreach. She’s established a strong online presence so patients searching for compounding services can find the pharmacy easily.

Khalkhali also credits OnPharm-United, a network for independent pharmacy owners, for the operational support, purchasing advantages and professional resources that help her run what

is primarily a solo pharmacy venture. (Khalkhali is currently interviewing graduate students to help with business development and hopes to onboard another pharmacist eventually.)

“I’m doing what I aspired to do for a long time. It’s more challenging but also very rewarding.”

"Elham is taking a focused, solutions-driven approach to patient care," says Sherif Guorgui, Co-Chief Executive Officer of OnPharm-United. "By building a specialized compounding practice, she's expanding the range of services available to her patients and showing how independent pharmacies are truly at the heart of their communities, bringing care closer to home and helping expand the capacity of the healthcare system."

A pharmacy with purpose

Originally from Iran, Khalkhali was drawn to healthcare early on, combining her love of chemistry with a desire to work directly with patients. After earning her PharmD in 1993, she built a career that spanned academia, the pharmaceutical industry, community pharmacy and long-term care before immigrating to Canada in 2002.

Over the next two decades, she worked in a variety of pharmacy settings across Ontario, including 14 years as a pharmacy manager for a national chain. She completed a Master of Business Administration through the University of Toronto, Rotman School of Management, during the COVID-19 pandemic. What she learned about finance, marketing, budgeting and business strategy fundamentally changed how she approached pharmacy practice and gave her the confidence to launch her own business.

Around the same time, Khalkhali began noticing a growing gap in access to compounding services in eastern Ontario. Patients struggled to find local pharmacies equipped to prepare customized medications, particularly during drug shortages or when commercially available products did not meet their needs. She completed advanced compounding training through the Professional Compounding Centers of America, along with additional coursework focused on non-sterile compounding and regulatory requirements.



Sherif Guorgui
ONPHARM-UNITED

Today, Compound Creations occupies approximately 1,400 square feet, with roughly half of the space dedicated to compounding operations. Khalkhali designed the pharmacy to support consultations and education, including a meeting room where she can host presentations and speak with patients and healthcare providers.

Unlike conventional dispensing workflows, compounded prescriptions require additional steps such as ingredient verification, risk assessments, preparation protocols, quality documentation and extensive patient counselling. A single prescription can take several hours to complete.

Khalkhali also works as a consultant compounding pharmacist with Pharma Medica Research Inc., which focuses on early-phase clinical trials in special patient populations. In addition to consulting on compounds for the studies, Elham was involved in building a high-level compounding lab in their pharmacy last year.

"I'm doing what I aspired to do for a long time. It's more challenging but also very rewarding. I love challenges and I learn a lot," she says.

“She’s expanding the range of services available to her patients and showing how independent pharmacies are truly at the heart of their communities, bringing care closer to home and helping expand the capacity of the healthcare system.”

Khalkhali's experiences so far reinforce her belief that compounding pharmacies play an increasingly important role within the healthcare system, particularly as drug shortages and demand for personalized therapies continue to grow.

Looking ahead, Khalkhali hopes to continue expanding both her pharmacy's services and her own role as an educator, mentor and advocate. Plans are also underway to integrate telehealth capabilities.

As someone who built her business from the ground up, Khalkhali understands that pharmacy entrepreneurship requires persistence as much as clinical expertise. Yet she's convinced the demand for personalized pharmacy care, right down to the medication dispensed, will continue to grow. She's excited to help shape that part of pharmacy's future. 🌈

Future-proofing pharmacy

Community pharmacy is entering a very different era compared to just a few years ago. Expanded scope of practice and professional services have helped reinforce pharmacy's role in the healthcare system, but sustainability remains one of the defining issues facing the profession. And the pace and scale of disruption facing the pharmacy sector continues to escalate.

Among the factors reshaping the pharmacy landscape: artificial intelligence and other technologies, pressure on payors and from payors, macro-economic and geopolitical uncertainty, direct-to-consumer healthcare channels, and medical advances such as GLP-1 and specialty medications. While the future remains bright, it is anything but straightforward.

That is why I am particularly proud of the work Neighbourhood Pharmacies has done over the past two years to position the sector for what comes next. Our 2025–2029 strategic plan, *Prescription for Success*, outlines a clear vision for thriving pharmacy businesses that can take optimized patient outcomes to the next level.

Policy decisions over the past several decades have steadily eroded the sustainability of the pharmacy sector. For a long time, conversations with governments about the “business of pharmacy” were approached with caution. Finally, in recent years, recognition is growing that financial sustainability is directly tied to strong patient outcomes.

Where governments have invested in pharmacy services—such as immunizations, medication management, and care for minor ailments—the results have demonstrated the significant value pharmacies bring to patients and the healthcare system. These outcomes highlight the importance of sustainable pharmacy funding in ensuring access to reliable, safe and cost-effective care.

That clarity has strengthened our voice and our role as an Association. Over the past several years, Neighbourhood Pharmacies has improved its governance structure, expanded collaboration with Members and Partners, and sharpened its focus on supporting the futurization of community pharmacy. We are increasingly engaging not only with ministries of health, but also with economic and labour sectors that recognize pharmacy's broader impact on communities and the healthcare system.

The profession cannot afford to stand still. As healthcare delivery continues to evolve, pharmacy continues to evolve with it. Neighbourhood Pharmacies is well positioned to help members navigate this next chapter and support a strong, innovative and sustainable pharmacy ecosystem across Canada.

As I pass the baton to Renée St-Jean, the new Chair of Neighbourhood Pharmacies, I am optimistic about the future. The challenges facing community pharmacy are significant, but so are the opportunities for our sector to assert its place as an essential and innovative contributor to healthcare in Canada. 🌈



Marie-Claude Vézina

PAST CHAIR OF
THE BOARD
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SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT
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“We are increasingly engaging not only with ministries of health, but also with economic and labour sectors that recognize pharmacy's broader impact.”



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The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada advocates for the business of community pharmacy and its vital role in sustaining the accessibility, quality and affordability of healthcare for Canadians. Through its Members and Partners, Neighbourhood Pharmacies is driving innovative solutions through advocacy, networking, research and information services.

The benefits of membership include:

- Industry-wide representation with governments
- Exclusive business-building networking events
- Real-time industry and regulatory updates
- Informed and independent information-sharing and analysis

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