



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

Association canadienne
**des pharmacies
de quartier**

**Submission to the House of Commons Standing
Committee on Industry, Science and Technology**

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I. Introduction

The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada (Neighbourhood Pharmacies) represents the full range of pharmacies, including chain, banner, long-term care, and specialty pharmacies, as well as grocery chains and mass merchandisers with pharmacies. Our focus is on improving the delivery of care. We advocate for pharmacies' role in caring for Canadians, both behind and in front of the counter. We aim to advance healthcare for Canadians by leveraging close to 11,000 pharmacies conveniently located in communities throughout the country as integral points of patient care.

Neighbourhood Pharmacies is proud of the tireless work of our members who are stepping up in critical ways to help fight the coronavirus pandemic and ensure that patients have access to the products and services they need without interruption. As governments across the country set economic recovery plans in motion while continuing to protect public health, community pharmacies stand prepared to further support Canada's COVID-19 planning and response efforts. Pharmacies are ready to work with our partners in public health – both in our communities and in the federal government – to continue to advance the health and welfare of Canadians during this pandemic.

As we navigate the steady stream of challenges posed by this pandemic, we are proud of our members. They have risen to meet the challenges and have stepped up as an integral level of support and frontline care in communities throughout Canada. We want to highlight that our sector and organization stand ready to support the government as you chart the future of healthcare and how it will be delivered.

This submission details the economic impact of COVID-19 on our members, offers recommendations for policies and programs as the country recovers, and takes into consideration a possible second wave of infections this fall.

II. Pharmacies Adapting Operations During COVID-19

Pharmacy has been recognized for providing essential public health services throughout COVID-19. Community pharmacies are managing an unprecedented volume of interactions with members of the public where access to other healthcare providers is limited. For many patients, their community pharmacist is their first and most frequent point of contact with the healthcare system, and is also their primary care provider.

With pharmacies designated an Essential Service, our members have stayed open to care for patients, despite being at high risk of infection as immediate frontline healthcare providers. To remain open, pharmacies have adopted numerous measures to minimize risk to staff and the public, including:

- Limiting the number of people inside stores because public health has established directives to restrict the flow of people;
- Installing physical barriers (including Plexiglas shields at counters), signage, sanitizing stations and other measures;
- Purchasing personal protective equipment for staff;
- Increasing routine cleaning and sanitization of stores and the dispensary;
- Increasing medication deliveries, allowing patients and customers to remain in quarantine and self-isolation.
- Instituting "hero pay" policies to retain and support frontline staff;
- Hiring additional staff when employees become ill or have to self-isolate;
- Managing higher workload and call volumes, with reduced store hours.

Collectively, pharmacies in Canada have spent more than \$955 million over the first 13-week period of the pandemic from March 16 to June 15, adapting their locations and operations to continue safely and effectively serving the public.

Without any clear indication of when the pandemic will cease, these costs will extend well into the future. Like other healthcare providers, pharmacies need to be supported as we work toward the same goals: serving patients, protecting the pharmaceutical supply chain to ensure all Canadians have access to the medicines they need, and creating capacity in health systems across the country throughout this crisis, and as we move towards recovery.

Recommendation #1:

As the federal government updates its policies for Canada’s ongoing pandemic response and recovery, Neighbourhood Pharmacies urges you to consider the needs of pharmacists and pharmacy operators – like other essential industries – who need access to an affordable, reliable supply of PPE.

III. Pharmacy’s Support for the COVID-19 Public Health Response and Economic Reopening

Across the country, our members stand ready to leverage the infrastructure of community pharmacies to support a strong, resilient public health system. Pharmacy professionals do more than dispense prescriptions – they are integral players in primary care, and in public and population health. Pharmacies are uniquely positioned to expand capacity and mitigate the strains placed on the healthcare system. Enabling pharmacists to deliver further assistance can help keep patients out of hospital and alleviate pressures on other healthcare resources, including family physicians and telehealth.

Widespread testing will be vital to ensure the successful reopening of economies across Canada while the pandemic runs its course. Our community pharmacies are the health system’s most accessible touchpoint for millions of Canadians. We believe the capacity and accessibility pharmacy delivers can readily be harnessed to expand testing capacity as we move toward the recovery phase – both for active COVID-19 and serology testing.

Recommendation #2:

As the federal government and the COVID-19 Immunity Task Force develop plans and guidelines to support serology testing, engage and leverage pharmacy professionals in community pharmacies for mass testing.

Pharmacies are ideally positioned to contribute critical data related to immunization and testing. The established digital infrastructure available to pharmacy through provincial drug plans can be leveraged to track tests and test results, and is readily accessible to the federal government through the Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI). In many cases, pharmacies can also track trends in consumer behaviours (over-the-counter purchases, etc.) that may serve as early predictors of disease or outbreaks.

Recommendation #3:

Engage pharmacies in the federal government’s data collection, tracking and tracing efforts.

This year, there will be an even greater level of importance placed on vaccines as the potential of a second wave of COVID-19 in the fall is a distinct possibility. Enlisting the support of pharmacies in vaccine provision and distribution may help mitigate the impact of influenza on the primary care and hospital system as we prepare for a second wave. By alleviating strains to the healthcare system, public health units can continue doing what they have done so well: prioritizing patients and ensuring vulnerable populations receive care.

Involving the pharmaceutical supply chain in vaccine distribution would expedite and improve efficiency of the overall process, and create capacity within public health, with a view to minimizing influenza-related hospitalizations at a time when hospitals and acute care centres may be at capacity.

Recommendation #4:

Consider the increased role pharmacies play in the distribution and provision of vaccines to protect Canadians – especially vulnerable seniors – from seasonal flu.

Neighbourhood Pharmacies know that the availability of a COVID-19 vaccine will be crucial to ending the pandemic. Capitalizing on the high degree of accessibility of pharmacies coupled with the trust and comfort Canadians have come to expect with pharmacist-administered immunization, pharmacies can help ensure the greatest number of Canadians can be vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Recommendation #5:

In preparing for the arrival of a future COVID-19 vaccine, include pharmacists and pharmacies in administration plans to leverage our infrastructure, expertise, efficiencies and accessibility.