



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

Association canadienne
**des pharmacies
de quartier**

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget
Consultation in Advance of the Upcoming Federal
Budget**

**By: Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of
Canada**

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Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the federal government engage pharmacies and pharmacy professionals on the development of plans and guidelines to support mass testing and leverage pharmacies' ability to support data collection and tracking efforts. We ask for the federal government's support to help provinces fund and deploy this critical measure as we move into the latter part of 2020.

Recommendation 2: That the federal government consider the increased role pharmacies play in the distribution and provision of vaccines to protect Canadians from seasonal flu, as well as for routine immunizations for children and adults. Furthermore, in preparing for the arrival of a future COVID-19 vaccine, that the federal government include pharmacists and pharmacies in deployment plans to leverage our infrastructure, expertise, efficiencies, and accessibility to support public health.

Recommendation 3: That the federal government consider the needs of pharmacists and pharmacy operators – like other essential services – among those who need priority access to an affordable, reliable supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) to continue to safely, effectively serve Canadians.

Introduction

The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada (Neighbourhood Pharmacies) appreciates the measures taken by the Canadian government to protect public health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognize the enormous strain the pandemic continues to place on the economy and public health system.

Neighbourhood Pharmacies is proud of the tireless work of our members. Pharmacies 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 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 supporting the health of Canadians during this pandemic. With close to 11,000 community pharmacies across the country, Canada's 43,000 pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare providers. Pharmacists are also often the first and most frequent point of contact many Canadians have with the healthcare system. Canadians see their pharmacist up to 10 times more frequently than they see any other healthcare provider. As the pandemic evolves, Canadian pharmacists are well positioned to support public health efforts to detect, prevent and respond to infectious diseases through an expanded role in COVID-19 immunization and testing.

Neighbourhood Pharmacies represents Canada's leading pharmacy organizations, including chain, banner, long-term care, specialty pharmacies, grocery chains, and mass merchandisers with pharmacies. 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 virtually every community throughout the country as integral points of patient care.

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 to support a safe economic restart.

This submission offers recommendations for policies and programs as the country recovers, and takes into consideration a possible second wave of infections this fall.

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 public and population health. Pharmacies are uniquely positioned to expand capacity and mitigate the strains placed on the healthcare system. We commend the federal government for acknowledging the role of pharmacy by extending exemptions to the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (CDSA). We believe the government will recognize the ongoing, measurable benefit to patient care that will be realized if these changes are made permanent. We ask that pharmacists be included among the list of practitioners within the CDSA.

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 testing and serology testing.

Recommendation 1: That the federal government engage pharmacies and pharmacy professionals in the development of plans and guidelines to support mass testing and leverage pharmacies' ability to support data collection and tracking efforts. We ask for the federal government's support to help provinces fund and deploy this critical measure as we move into the latter part of 2020.

Community pharmacy represents an opportunity to support broad COVID-19 diagnostic and serologic testing, particularly as point of care tests (either self-administered or administered by a healthcare provider) become more widely available in Canada. Pharmacists in the United States and Alberta are now successfully administering COVID-19 tests, and other provinces in Canada are investigating similar opportunities. We believe that pharmacies are uniquely positioned to support in the broad administration of asymptomatic COVID-19 testing as the economy continues to re-open to ensure that Canadians have convenient access to COVID-19 testing in the communities in which they live and work. We ask for the federal government's support to help provinces fund and deploy this critical measure as we move into the latter part of 2020.

Pharmacies already have data systems recording all claims processed in the pharmacy. Currently, all drug claims are captured through these systems. Should claims for vaccines and testing be processed through these systems – as is done for the influenza vaccine in most provinces – this data would be easily captured in the same manner and would be readily available to the provincial ministries. The data can in turn be shared with the federal government. This digital infrastructure could be leveraged to track testing, test results, and vaccination records, which would be of great value as Canada makes its way through the COVID-19 recovery phase. This also represents a first step in the further integration of this digital infrastructure with the primary care and public health network to leverage these important community resources.

Detecting, testing and responding to infectious disease is the primary tenet of public health. Community pharmacies can assist public health efforts in this area and specifically as part of the COVID-19 response. We believe that we can be an integral part of the solution to support extensive testing in the community, implement and enhance widespread vaccination to increase vaccine uptake, educate patients and enable effective data tracking and analysis.

Recommendation 2: That the federal government consider the increased role pharmacies play in the distribution and provision of vaccines to protect Canadians from seasonal flu, as well as for routine immunizations for children and adults. Furthermore, in preparing for the arrival of a future COVID-19 vaccine, that the federal government include pharmacists and pharmacies in deployment plans to leverage our infrastructure, expertise, efficiencies, and accessibility to support public health.

Pharmacists are already significant and direct contributors to vaccine-related public health programs for influenza and infectious disease. Last year alone, community pharmacists provided over 35 per cent of all influenza vaccinations in Canada. Their accessibility and longitudinal relationships with patients allow pharmacists to provide education and awareness, increase vaccination rates, and support adherence through multiple touchpoints over patients' life span. We have seen significant success with pharmacist-administered influenza programs and know that pharmacists can further support public health initiatives with other vaccines.

When a COVID-19 vaccine is available, public health and primary care capacity will be challenged to provide widespread immunization, and community pharmacy is poised to help. COVID-19 vaccine administration through community pharmacy could offer a valuable opportunity to collect, integrate, analyze and mobilize data through provincial drug program claims. Pharmacies are also well positioned to provide information on the number of vaccines per region to identify immunization rates and behavior patterns. This information can be integrated with other public health data, both provincially and federally, to contribute to overall analysis and modelling.

Furthermore, we believe there is an opportunity to further expand pharmacists' role in the management, distribution and administration of other routine vaccinations – for both children and adults. We have seen vaccination schedules for children be delayed as a result of COVID-19. Unlike physician offices, pharmacies have remained (and will remain) open throughout the pandemic and can assist with this key public health mandate.

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 distribution and administration may help mitigate pressures on the public health, primary care and hospital systems 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. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that pharmaceutical distribution of vaccines leads to a significant reduction in waste.

Neighbourhood Pharmacies knows 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.

Pharmacies Adapting Operations During COVID-19

Pharmacy has been recognized for providing essential public health and primary care services throughout COVID-19. Community pharmacies have managed an unprecedented volume of interactions with members of the public where access to other healthcare providers was and continues to be 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.

Without any clear indication of when the pandemic will cease, many of these measures and associated 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 3: That the federal government consider the needs of pharmacists and pharmacy operators – like other essential industries – who need access to an affordable, reliable supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) to continue to safely and effectively serve the healthcare needs of Canadians.