



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

Association canadienne
**des pharmacies
de quartier**

First Interim Report on Improving Healthcare and Ending Hallway Medicine:

Submission to the Premier's Council



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The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada welcomes the release of the first interim report of the Premier's Council on Improving Healthcare and Ending Hallway Medicine, chaired by Rueben Devlin. We are also pleased to have the opportunity to submit input for the ongoing work being done to create a better, more efficient healthcare system for Ontario.

The Neighbourhood Pharmacy is the trade association representing Canada's 10,500 pharmacies—4,327 of which are serving people across the province, including Ontario's rural and remote communities. We represent the neighbourhood brand, banner and franchise pharmacies, as well as grocery chains and mass merchandisers with pharmacies. Our pharmacies are deeply rooted in their communities, filling over 75 per cent of Canadian prescriptions annually.

We agree on this report's central point: "the entire health care system is too complicated to navigate, people are waiting too long to receive care and too often are receiving care in the wrong place; as a result, our hospitals are crowded." (p. 3) Neighbourhood Pharmacies, and our partners, believe that the solution is to unlock capacity within the system. Specifically, pharmacy and pharmacists are an able and willing partner in this mission.

Expanding roles and functions for qualified health professionals

In all they do our members are relentlessly focused on patients, with the most trusted providers of drug therapies, pharmacy-based patient services and creative healthcare solutions. We are already doing our part to ensure the sustainability of quality care in Ontario – helping to tackle hallway medicine by ensuring Ontarians adhere to their medications to avoid hospitalization and adverse events, operating an efficient supply chain and bringing new drug therapies and lower-cost generic drugs to Ontario families. All of which has been against a backdrop of significant cuts over the last decade to the frontlines of service delivery and care in pharmacy.

The challenges of hallway medicine will not be solved in isolation or singularly through physician offices, long-term care and hospitals, nor by simply adding more beds to the system. Increasing capacity in the community is necessary. To better meet the needs of the Ontario people we must expand the accessibility of pharmacy services.

Pharmacy and pharmacists are ready and willing to take on a greater role to deliver better, more efficient care in the community for Ontarians. In particular, pharmacy is well-positioned with the ability to streamline services, facilitate improved integration across the healthcare system and as a community-based point of care for people experiencing minor health and medication issues, allowing more people to access care in the community and without visiting the hospital emergency room. *Creating Capacity* is a plan co-developed by OPA and Neighbourhood Pharmacies to improve patient care through the following recommendations:

1. Enable patients to see a trained pharmacist close to home for the assessment and, if necessary, **treatment of common ailments**, such as pink eye, cold sores, acne, uncomplicated skin infections, and other conditions;



2. Allow patients to receive **all publicly-funded immunizations**, such as shingles and pneumonia vaccines, particularly for less mobile patients and seniors, from trained pharmacists who already administer flu shots and travel vaccines; and,
3. Ensure patients' therapies are being appropriately monitored in real-time for potential toxicities and effectiveness through **pharmacist-administered point-of-care testing**, such as A1C for diabetes, INR for blood disorders or lipids for cardiovascular health, and testing for strep and flu.

By ensuring we are optimizing the scope of all practitioners, namely pharmacists, we can provide more proactive and preventative healthcare and help to reduce the burnout of healthcare professionals while alleviating the burdens of wait times for patients. Doing so will create capacity in the delivery of care, when and where people need it, while respecting taxpayers through the delivery of more efficient and accessible care.

Partners in Mental Health and Addictions Care

A key theme in your Councils report is the concern that patients are not able to access mental health and addictions services when and where they need it. Specifically, you identify that mental health and addictions are better treated in the community and that prevention and early intervention are important to better address mental health needs and to help end hallway medicine.

The system needs all health care providers to practice to the fullest extent of their training and expertise, namely pharmacist, if we are going to effectively address mental health and addictions challenges at the community level. One such area where pharmacists are particularly poised to assist the system on mental health and addictions is in the use and management of opioid therapies.

Opioids can be an effective medication when used properly but carry a significant risk of addiction. Every day in this province more than five people become dependent on prescription opioids and opioid-related deaths have increased by a dramatic 136 per cent since 2003. Among those hospitalized for opioid dependence, more than half started using opioid therapies initially to treat pain.

Pharmacists are the medication experts working in every community and neighbourhood across the province. As such, they are uniquely placed to help. As you are likely aware, pain-related complaints account for 30 per cent of emergency room visits in Ontario—many of which could be avoided through better management of early acute pain and preventing the development of chronic pain, thereby helping to end hallway medicine as well as reduce costs and average wait times for all Ontarians.

As part of our 2019 pre-budget submission, Neighbourhood Pharmacy has proposed the launch of an Ontario Pharmacy Pain Management Program. By launching pain management services in pharmacy, pharmacists can educate people on the potential risks associated with opioids—and offer alternative therapies where appropriate. We all agree that people living with acute or chronic pain should have access to the therapies they need. Patients would be provided with one-on-one support to appropriately manage pain while mitigating the potential risks of addiction with services from their trusted pharmacist, including:

- A baseline pain and medication assessment for the patient and goals of therapy
- A critical review of the appropriateness of the opioid drugs
- Core counselling on the relevant drug including alternative and supplemental therapies
- Education on proper drug storage and disposal
- Follow-up dialogues between pharmacist and patient



Let's use the accessibility, understanding and expertise of our front-line pharmacists to deliver better care and quality of life for patients living with pain. Pharmacists can be a key resource in preventing the cycle of addiction before it begins. Opening the door for pharmacists to play a greater role in medication management and monitoring will help close the current gap in care by focusing on prevention through pharmacist intervention to avert the harms associated with dependency, and associated hospitalizations, before it happens.

Modernizing Ontario's Healthcare System

Modernization will be key to a more efficient and sustainable healthcare system for Ontario. In the Council's report, you have recognized the opportunities to use technology as a tool to help coordinate and deliver services, improve patient outcomes and to truly integrate our health care system.

Pharmacists play a key role in the collection and maintenance of health data for patients, including records of all medications, non-prescription products, vitamins and natural supplements as well as patient medication adherence and up to date information on chronic conditions and health status. In fact, when it comes to medication records, pharmacies have the most up to date records for patients. Additionally, as a first point of contact in the community for many Ontarians, pharmacists can often become aware of significant changes or challenges to a patient's health before they've visited their primary care practitioner, giving them vital information and making them a key partner in the patients' circle of care.

There are opportunities to enhance the access and ability for pharmacists to share critical patient information through the circle of care, seamlessly and through the improved use of technology. Pharmacy is already utilizing a fully digital and standardized format for patient records. As such, looking to the pharmacy model is a great place to start as government considers opportunities to scale and spread digital care and records across Ontario's healthcare system. We urge the Council to include pharmacy in their planning and discussions for how to better leverage technology to provide patients with better quality and more seamless care in the community.

Conclusion

Ontario's healthcare system is at a crossroads. Transformation is needed and opportunities exist to deliver better, more streamlined and patient-focused care for the Ontario people. The time is now to fully optimize the skills and capacity that exist currently within our healthcare system and our healthcare professionals, namely pharmacists, to improve care.

Neighbourhood Pharmacy, as well as the pharmacies and pharmacists we represent, are more than ready and willing to work with government and to take on a greater role in delivering more streamlined, integrated healthcare to Ontarians. We can no longer afford the status quo—we must do things differently. Let's not let this opportunity to ensure every Ontarian has simplified access to timely, expert care in their community slip away.