



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

Association canadienne
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Alberta 2020 Budget Submission

**Neighbourhood Pharmacy
Association of Canada**

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation: Support and maintain the continuation of the current Pharmacy Services Framework

Recommendation: Expand the delivery and reimbursement for all publicly funded vaccines to pharmacists, including pharmacists assuming responsibility for the delivery of Alberta's flu vaccine program.

Recommendation: Engage pharmacists as knowledgeable participants to support the Government of Alberta's Biosimilars Initiative, with a view to delivering on government objectives, and improving patient outcomes.

Recommendation: As the federal and provincial discussions on pharmacare progress, we request that the Alberta government continues to work directly with pharmacy partners to ensure that any new pharmacare plan builds on existing drug coverage plans, while maintaining the high-quality coverage many Albertans already receive.

Recommendation: Cannabis for medical purposes should be available through pharmacies by authorization, or through pharmacists as authorizers, in a system in which pharmacists can assess and continually monitor use, dosage and duration.

INTRODUCTION

Pharmacists are the medication experts working in every community across the province. Alberta's pharmacies are deeply embedded in and committed to the communities they serve. Our members employ over 34,000 Albertans and generate over \$2.6 billion in GDP for the province. Every day, pharmacists in 1,300 locations across the province, provide front-line care and medication advice to the people of Alberta – in both rural and remote communities. These pharmacy services support Albertans to live with better health and quality of life.

The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada (“Neighbourhood Pharmacies”) is the trade association representing Canada's 10,500 pharmacies – contributing to 250,000 Canadian jobs and \$16.1B to the national economy. We represent the neighbourhood brand, banner and franchise pharmacies, as well as grocery chains and mass merchandisers with pharmacies. We also represent pharmacies serving patients in long-term care and those living with complex diseases requiring specialty medications and services. Our members fill over 70 per cent of Canadian prescriptions annually and are home to the most trusted providers of drug therapies, pharmacy-based patient services and innovative health care solutions.

We support the government's vision and overarching goal to bring transformation to Alberta's health care system. Specifically, we are pleased to see government taking swift action to create more seamless and connected health care – change that puts the people of Alberta first.

The challenges of hallway health care will not be solved in isolation nor singularly through physician offices and hospitals. As your partners in community-based health care delivery, we must work together to expand the accessibility of pharmacy services to better meet the needs of the people of Alberta.

Uniquely situated in virtually every community in the province, pharmacy has a unique ability to streamline and facilitate improved integration of health services. Pharmacists in Alberta are already helping to create capacity in the provincial health care system by allowing patients to conveniently access care at their community pharmacy, without having to visit the hospital emergency room. Pharmacy and pharmacists are well-positioned to continually advance our role in health care delivery, providing support to patients locally and serving as a community resource.

MAINTAIN STRENGTH OF PHARMACY SERVICES FRAMEWORK

Currently in Alberta, the pharmacy services framework has proven to be very effective both from an operational and economic perspective.

Pharmacists play a key role in primary care in Alberta. To date, in the 2019-2020 flu-season, 850,000 flu shots have been administered by pharmacists. This, along with pharmacists' advanced prescribing abilities, has resulted in cost savings for government, and time saved by patients. Most importantly, pharmacy-administered flu shots have enabled hundreds of thousands of Albertans to receive an influenza vaccine this flu season.

Alberta has led the way for pharmacy services in the past, and should continue to lead in the pharmacy space. Neighbourhood Pharmacies supports the government's vision of *right place, right time, right profession* – and supports a vision for better, more sustainable health care through bold action and responsibility.

Recommendation: Support and maintain the continuation of the current Pharmacy Services Framework

CONTINUE MAXIMIZING PHARMACISTS' EXPERTISE TO CREATE CAPACITY AND ALLEVIATE PRESSURE ON THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

If our health system is going to be sustainable and patients are going to get the excellent care they deserve, we must ensure all health professionals are putting their training, knowledge and experience to good use. Pharmacy is well-positioned to play a greater role in the delivery of public health services, creating capacity and alleviating pressure on clinics, physicians and nurses.

Despite Alberta's great leadership in pharmacy services, community pharmacists remain one of the most underutilized health care professionals within the health care network. Increasing capacity in the community is necessary. To better meet the needs of Albertans, we must continue to expand the scope for pharmacists and accessibility of pharmacy services.

Pharmacists have played a significant role in making the flu shot more accessible to Albertans, while also demonstrating a cost-effective alternative for the province. We recommend that pharmacists assume full responsibility for the delivery of Alberta's flu vaccines for all Albertans over the age of five, and leverage the well-established pharmaceutical supply chain to efficiently, safely and cost-effectively distribute vaccines to pharmacies in all communities. Currently, Alberta's flu vaccine program is delivered by public health units, pharmacies and primary care physicians. Allowing the flu vaccine program to be fully administered by pharmacists would create capacity in public health

units and primary care physicians' offices, allowing them take on responsibilities that the system is strained to provide.

Additionally, although pharmacists are trained and able to administer a number of other vaccines, they are not all reimbursed. We recommend that all publicly funded vaccines also be reimbursed when administered by pharmacists. By reimbursing these vaccines when administered in pharmacy as they would otherwise be if administered in clinics of physicians' offices, we can make it more convenient for Albertans to receive these potentially life-saving vaccines. Again, this would create capacity in public health units allowing them take on other responsibilities that the system is strained to provide.

Recommendation: Expand the delivery and reimbursement for all publicly funded vaccines to pharmacists, including pharmacists assuming responsibility for the delivery of Alberta's flu vaccine program.

TRANSITION AND EDUCATION FOR BIOSIMILAR DRUGS

Neighbourhood Pharmacies supports the Government of Alberta's goal to transition to biosimilars as an effective way to contain and alleviate health system expenditures. We believes we can play an instrumental and effective role, working collaboratively to support you in the implementation of this initiative

The role pharmacies play in safely transitioning patients from biologics to biosimilars is critical to the success of the initiative. Pharmacists have the expertise to identify, counsel and oversee patients transitioning from a biologic to a biosimilar. Additionally, pharmacies have invested heavily in the infrastructure that supports the administration and care of patients on complex medicines in community.

In leaning on pharmacy to provide these services, government will increase its probability of achieving desired outcomes; and your efforts will be underpinned by a network of trusted health care providers in community-based locations across the province.

Recommendation: Engage pharmacists as knowledgeable participants to support the Government of Alberta's Biosimilars Initiative, with a view to delivering on government objectives, and improving patient outcomes.

ACCESS TO MEDICATION FOR ALL ALBERTANS

The federal government is currently looking at options to implement a National Pharmacare program. Specifics surrounding their pharmacare policy have not been released and further discussions with provincial governments are expected later this year.

Neighbourhood Pharmacies would like to build on the success we have had working with the Alberta government to ensure that all Albertans have access to the medications they need to live a healthy life.

Recommendation: As the federal and provincial discussions on pharmacare progress, we request that the Alberta government continues to work directly with pharmacy partners to ensure that any new pharmacare plan builds on existing drug coverage plans while maintaining the high-quality coverage many Albertans already receive.

IMPROVING SAFETY AND PATIENT EXPERIENCE FOR MEDICAL CANNABIS

Albertans receiving cannabis for medical purposes should have access to the same support, counselling and oversight as any other Albertan prescribed medication to manage a medical condition. However, in the current environment, this is not the case for most Albertans.

Cannabis can offer a variety of therapeutic benefits, either on its own or as a complement to other treatments. However, like any medication, cannabis use is not without potential risks when used improperly, inappropriately, or in conjunction with other medications.

The body of research on the therapeutic use and potential benefits of cannabis is growing. Yet, without a strong body of conclusive clinical evidence, there is a critical need and benefit of pharmacists' oversight and counselling advice on medical cannabis use. Providing access in pharmacies to trusted support and information will improve the likelihood that patients will achieve optimal therapeutic benefits and, most importantly, that such benefits will be achieved safely and without unnecessary risk. Pharmacists, as regulated health care professionals, can provide patients with the most current research updates and educate patients on the best medical cannabis treatment options available. As regulated health care professionals, pharmacists can also collect data to help monitor the impact of medical cannabis to inform research developments.

Pharmacies already play a significant role in managing medications and the distribution of controlled products. Like anyone receiving a prescribed medication, Albertans receiving cannabis for medical purposes should not be left to a game of chance that puts their health and wellbeing on the line. Our members are committed to working with the Alberta government, and all levels of government, to ensure that cannabis products are safely dispensed in pharmacies.

Recommendation: Cannabis for medical purposes should be available through pharmacies by authorization, or through pharmacists as authorizers, in a system in which pharmacists can assess and continually monitor use, dosage and duration.

CONCLUSION

Our members are Alberta's most trusted providers of drug therapies, pharmacy-based patient services and creative health care solutions. We are doing our part to ensure the sustainability of quality care in Alberta and to improve the patient experience.

We are encouraged by the positive steps this government has taken to improve care for the people of Alberta. Neighbourhood Pharmacies and our members are committed to the vision of a 21st century health system – a more accessible, integrated, coordinated and patient-centred health system. We believe the recommendations proposed in this submission will help us to achieve this vision. We will continue working with government, stakeholders, patients and health care providers to support the shared goal of providing accessible, high-quality care to the people of Alberta.