



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

Association canadienne
**des pharmacies
de quartier**

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Mark Wyatt
Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Health
3rd Floor, 3475 Albert Street
Regina, SK S4S 6X6

April 22, 2020

Dear Mark:

As COVID-19 spreads and more cases are identified in Saskatchewan, the Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada (Neighbourhood Pharmacies) offers our support. Pharmacy operators are working tirelessly each day, stepping up in critical ways to deliver products and services to patients without interruption. As cases increase, so do calls and visits to pharmacies. We are proud of our members and how they have risen to meet these challenges, and our sector stands ready to continue to support your government; but our ability to do more or even to maintain these standards may be limited in the medium to long term. We hope to have a constructive dialogue about what the coming months will look like, what role you see pharmacy playing in your province's public health response, and how we can work together to ensure pharmacy is ready to support your goals.

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 also advocate for pharmacies' role in caring for Canadians, behind and in front of the counter. We aim to advance healthcare for Saskatchewanians by leveraging close to 400 community pharmacies conveniently located in communities across the province as integral points of patient care.

As you know, pharmacies have been designated an essential service during COVID-19 and, as such, are required to remain open. Pharmacy has risen to meet this challenge. Yet, collectively pharmacies have incurred significant costs to adapt their locations – with minimal financial support from government. In many cases, pharmacies also do not qualify for federal or provincial government programs that have been extended to many other businesses to support their continued operations. Community pharmacists are currently dealing with an unprecedented volume of interactions with members of the public because access to other healthcare providers is restricted. As essential health services, pharmacies are remaining open and putting in place numerous measures to minimize risk for staff and the public.

In Saskatchewan alone, in the month of March, pharmacies spent an estimated \$0.6 million in one-time costs to retrofit their stores with sanitizing stations, physical barriers and signage to meet public health guidelines and ensure they can operate safely. Ongoing costs are far more considerable as, over the first 10 weeks of the pandemic (extending to May 17th), we estimate that pharmacies in Saskatchewan will have incurred an estimated \$2.5 million each week to ensure they can safely care for patients and support their communities.

To give you a more in-depth understanding of the changes and costs undertaken by pharmacies, I have attached a “Pharmacy Costs Due to COVID-19” document. Informed by detailed research and analysis, and validated by contributions from our members (representing about 70% of pharmacies across the country), this document serves to illustrate, for your benefit, the extent of the changes pharmacies have had to implement.

Here is a cursory glance:

- Pharmacies have had to limit the number of people in stores because public health has established directives to restrict the flow of people permitted inside. Pharmacies carry out this measure to support public health guidance on physical distancing, ensuring customers and patients can maintain a safe distance from one another and from pharmacy staff.
- Physical barriers (including Plexiglas shields at counters) have been installed at a cost of approximately \$0.3 million. In fact, multiple measures to promote public health and safety have been required in order to remain compliant with public health directives. These additional measures include signage and the installation of sanitizing stations or products in stores to ensure that pharmacies can continue to safely and effectively serve the public at a moment when they’re depending on pharmacy more than ever.
- Pharmacies are required to purchase protective equipment for their staff, who have not had access to government-acquired PPE. Routine cleaning and sanitization of stores, in addition to acquiring PPE cost an average of \$0.5 million per week. Additionally, given the inconsistency of PPE supply and availability, pharmacists’ ability to provide consultative services beyond prescription management has been reduced.
- Pharmacies are supporting patients and customers in quarantine and self-isolation by offering increased medication deliveries, costing Saskatchewan pharmacies an estimated \$0.7 million weekly.
- Many pharmacies have also instituted "Hero Pay" policies, estimated at \$0.4 million, to retain and / or support frontline staff. They have also hired additional staff to cover employees who become ill or have had to self-isolate, as well as to manage higher workload and call volumes, with reduced store hours which has cost an estimated \$0.8 million each week.

Collectively, pharmacies in Saskatchewan will have spent close to \$27 million over the 10-week period from March 16th to May 17th, to adapt their locations and operations so they

can remain open to safely and effectively serve the public during this pandemic. In reality, most of these costs will continue to extend well beyond May 17th as the pandemic persists, without a clear indication of when it will cease. Our pharmacists and their teams will continue to care for patients, despite being at high risk of infection as immediate frontline healthcare providers.

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 Saskatchewanians, and all Canadians, have access to the medicines they need, and creating capacity in health systems across the province throughout this crisis.

Neighbourhood Pharmacies is aligned with the Pharmacy Association of Saskatchewan (PAS) who has been advocating for weeks for pharmacies to have access to funded PPE in order to continue to safely serve patients, financial support for additional costs related to the pandemic, such as an exponential increase in delivery costs, and more tools for pharmacists to be better supported on increasing drug shortages (e.g. therapeutic substitution authority and funding).

Please reach out to me at shanna@neighbourhoodpharmacies.ca to determine dates and times that would be convenient for you, for a teleconference or virtual meeting to plan and discuss how Pharmacy can continue to effectively support Saskatchewan's COVID-19 response.

In the meanwhile, sincerely hoping you remain healthy throughout the coming months.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Hanna', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sandra Hanna, RPh
Chief Executive Officer
Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada