



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

Association canadienne
**des pharmacies
de quartier**

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Mr. Patrick Dicerni
Assistant Deputy Minister and Executive Officer
Drugs and Devices Division
Ontario Public Drug Programs Ministry of Health
438 University Avenue, 10th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1N3

Dear Patrick,

As COVID-19 spreads and more cases are identified in Ontario, the Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada (Neighbourhood Pharmacies) offers its 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.

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 Ontarians by leveraging over 4,500 community pharmacies conveniently located in neighbourhoods 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. Pharmacies have risen to meet this challenge, yet collectively, they have incurred significant costs to adapt their locations – with no financial support from government. In many cases, pharmacies do not qualify for federal or provincial government programs that have been extended to many other businesses to support their continued operations. Community pharmacists and technicians are currently trying to manage an unprecedented volume of interactions with members of the public because access to other healthcare providers has been limited. As essential health service providers, pharmacies are remaining open and putting in place numerous measures to minimize risk for staff and the public.

In Ontario alone, in the month of March, pharmacies spent an estimated \$7.1 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 17), we

estimate that pharmacies will have incurred an estimated *\$29.9 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, we have attached a “Pharmacy Costs Due to COVID-19” document. Informed by detailed research and analysis, and validated by data 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 at any time 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 \$3.4 million. In fact, multiple measures to promote public health and safety have been required in order to remain compliant with public health directives, including signage and the installation of sanitizing stations or products in stores to ensure we 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 the cost of acquiring PPE cost an average of \$5.9 million per week.
- Pharmacies are supporting patients and customers in quarantine and self-isolation by offering increased medication deliveries, costing Ontario pharmacies an estimated \$8.2 million weekly.
- Many pharmacies have also instituted "Hero Pay" policies, estimated at \$4.8 million, to retain and/or support frontline staff. They have also hired additional staff to replace 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 \$9.7 million each week.

Collectively, pharmacies in Ontario will have spent close to \$310 million over the 10-week period from March 16 to May 17, 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 17 as the pandemic persists, without a clear indication of when it will abate. 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 they work toward the same goals: serving patients, protecting the pharmaceutical supply chain to ensure

Ontarians 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 Ontario Pharmacists Association (OPA) in wanting to assist Ontarians as we collectively confront the challenges of this pandemic. Pharmacies continue to play a critical role in safeguarding the pharmaceutical supply chain to ensure that all Ontarians have access to the medicines they require. As we carry out this responsibility, we urge the government to support Ontarians by in turn supporting the temporary policy to limit medications to 30 days, in order to protect and maintain the supply chain. The goal is to mitigate worsening of long-standing shortages and prevent future ones from developing.

While we acknowledge the policy is inconvenient for some patients, pharmacies continue to put the measures needed in place to best support patients through these difficult times, and pharmacists are enabled to apply their professional judgment based on extenuating circumstances and can dispense a 90-day supply for clinical reasons, impracticality (e.g., for rural/remote communities) or for extreme financial constraints.

Finally, it is important to note that your 30-day dispensing policy has received strong endorsement and support from all supply chain stakeholders, including manufacturers and distributors. The sole intention of this policy has been to ensure that patients can have confidence that their medications will be there when they need them during this pandemic. Pharmacists will continue to work with patients each and every day to understand and navigate their unique needs.

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 Ontario's COVID-19 response.

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

Regards,



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