



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

Association canadienne
**des pharmacies
de quartier**

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May 28, 2020

Mr. Darren Fisher, MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Fisher,

The Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada (Neighbourhood Pharmacies) is proud of the tireless work of our members who 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 further support Canada's COVID-19 planning and response efforts. Pharmacies are ready to work with your government to continue to advance public health and to take on increased roles in immunization, community testing, and data collection activities.

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 Canadians by leveraging close to 11,000 pharmacies conveniently located in communities throughout the country as integral points of patient care.

Pharmacy has been recognized for providing essential public health services throughout COVID-19, and community pharmacies are managing an unprecedented volume of interactions with members of the public where access to other healthcare providers is limited. For many patients, their community pharmacy is their first point of contact, and primary care provider.

Our members have remained open to continue to care for patients, while being at high risk of infection like other frontline healthcare providers. To remain open, pharmacies have adopted numerous measures to minimize risk for 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 protective equipment for staff, since pharmacy has not had access to government-acquired PPE;

- Increasing the 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 workloads and call volumes, with reduced store hours.

Collectively, pharmacies in Canada have spent more than \$740 million over the 10-week period from March 16 to May 17, to adapt their locations and operations to remain open to safely and effectively serve the public during this pandemic.

Without any clear indication of when the pandemic will cease, these 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 toward recovery.

As the federal government seeks to update policies with respect to Canada's ongoing pandemic response and recovery, Neighbourhood Pharmacies urges you to consider the needs of pharmacists and pharmacy operators who need access to an affordable, reliable supply of PPE.

Furthermore, we believe there is an opportunity to look at renewed ways to leverage the infrastructure of community pharmacies to support a strong, resilient public health system. Pharmacies are uniquely positioned to create capacity and mitigate some of the stress placed on the healthcare system as the pandemic response endures. Enabling pharmacists to further assist patients can help keep patients out of hospital and alleviate the pressures on other healthcare resources, including family physicians.

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 increase testing capacity as we move toward the recovery phase. As you prepare your plan to support provinces in increasing testing and consider the possibility of future serological testing, we are eager to discuss and outline how pharmacy can help.

Pharmacies can play a larger role in the distribution and provision of vaccines to support public health – both by delivering influenza immunization in vulnerable populations and contributing to the pandemic vaccine response through community testing. Additionally, pharmacies are ideally positioned to contribute critical data related to immunization and testing through an established digital infrastructure through provincial drug plans and hence easily accessible federally through the Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI). In many cases, pharmacies can also help track trends in consumer behaviours (over-the-counter purchases, etc.) that may serve as early predictors of disease or outbreaks.

As you know, 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 pharmacy in vaccine provision and distribution may help mitigate the impacts of influenza on the primary care and hospital system as we prepare for a second wave of COVID-19 and allow public health units to continue doing what they have done so well: prioritizing patients and ensuring vulnerable populations receive care. Involving the pharmaceutical supply chain in vaccine provision and distribution would expedite and improve efficiency of the overall process, and create capacity within public health, with a view to minimizing influenza-related hospitalizations of Canadians at a time when hospitals and acute care centres may be at capacity.

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 your government as you chart the future of healthcare and how it will be delivered.

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 Canada'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