



Neighbourhood  
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## British Columbia 2021 Budget Submission

Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada

### Summary of Recommendations

*Recommendation #1: Support an expanded role for pharmacies in the administration of seasonal flu vaccine to help maximize uptake and allow public health clinics to focus on the COVID-19 response and other priorities.*

*Recommendation #2: Modernize the distribution of influenza vaccines by leveraging the existing pharmacy supply chain to help create capacity in the public health system, minimize shortages and leverage existing distribution networks.*

*Recommendation #3: Leverage the 1,400 pharmacies throughout the province as the government defines British Columbia's testing strategy to increase access to COVID-19 serology testing.*

### Introduction:

Neighbourhood Pharmacies is the respected voice and advocate for the business of pharmacy in British Columbia. We represent Canada's leading pharmacy organizations including chain, banner, long-term care and specialty pharmacies, as well as grocery chains and mass merchandisers with pharmacies. 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 healthcare solutions.

Our pharmacies are deeply embedded in and committed to the communities they serve. Today, pharmacists are considered the primary providers of medication management services. They are routinely consulted by patients and other healthcare providers for advice on dosing, effectiveness, and safety. Data confirms that patients see their pharmacist up to ten times more frequently than they see their primary care physician<sup>1</sup>, and this presents a great opportunity for pharmacists to do more for British Columbians.

Our many B.C. members across the province have been working on the frontlines of the COVID-19 public health crisis from the outset, supporting British Columbians and serving their communities with tireless dedication. As a designated essential service, pharmacies remained open to support their communities. Community pharmacists continue to deal with an unprecedented volume of interactions with members of the public as access to other healthcare providers is restricted.

Like other businesses, pharmacies have incurred significant costs to adapt their locations to follow public health guidelines with minimal financial support from government. Our members remained open

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<sup>1</sup> Tsuyuki RT, Beahm NP, Okada H, Al Hamarneh YN. Pharmacists as accessible primary health care providers: review of the evidence. Can Pharm J (Ott) 2018;151(1):4–5. doi: 10.1177/1715163517745517.



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to continue to care for patients, while being at high risk of infection like other frontline healthcare providers. To remain open safely, pharmacies adopted numerous measures to minimize risk for staff and the public, including acquiring personal protective equipment for staff, installing in-store physical barriers and signage to encourage physical distancing, enhancing sanitization and store cleaning procedures, and increasing delivery services to support British Columbians who are self-isolating. To protect staff and the public during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, B.C. pharmacies collectively have spent an estimated \$92.7 between March 16 and May 17, and these costs will continue as the pandemic persists.

We believe there is an opportunity for pharmacy to deliver critical services as we transition through the reopening phases of the pandemic – including broader immunization services and point-of-care testing – to fortify B.C.’s overall strategy of an improved healthcare delivery model. We are available and willing to provide the supports the health system will require as we look at new ways to respond to COVID-19 and future health crises, and as we work through public health and economic recovery phases. To ensure our health system can operate effectively throughout the pandemic and into the future, we must make sure all health professionals can contribute the full extent of their training, knowledge and expertise.

We also believe there is an opportunity to look at renewed ways to leverage the existing infrastructure of community pharmacies to support government’s vision of a strong, resilient primary care system. Community pharmacies can play an important role by assisting patients closer to home, ensuring continuity of care, facilitating integration of information, and allowing government and public health to focus on other priorities.

Below are some specific ways we feel the pharmacy sector can help support the government’s public health goals.

***Recommendation #1:** Support an expanded role for pharmacies in the administration of seasonal flu vaccine to help maximize uptake and allow public health clinics to focus on the COVID-19 response and other priorities.*

Every year, thousands of British Columbians are affected by the influenza virus during the peak months of November through March, a time most of us refer to as “Flu Season.” The evidence is clear that the best way to protect yourself against influenza and reduce the spread of the virus is by getting vaccinated.

Seniors are the demographic group most affected by the flu. A naturally weakened immune system, often coupled with other chronic or age-related health issues, leaves seniors particularly vulnerable to more severe effects of the flu. Seniors aged 65 and older account for up to 70 per cent of influenza-related hospitalizations—the highest of any demographic group—and roughly 90 per cent of influenza-



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related deaths<sup>2</sup>. Ensuring that seniors can readily access the high dose influenza vaccine at their neighbourhood pharmacy is critical to ensuring the protection of these vulnerable populations.

Seasonal flu and COVID-19 both attack the respiratory system, and we know it is likely we will be tackling both COVID-19 and the seasonal flu at the same time this fall. Accordingly, the success of the 2020 flu vaccination campaign will be critical to the health system's ability to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. We expect there will be an even greater level of importance placed on vaccines for our most vulnerable citizens, given the probability of a second wave of COVID-19 in the fall. Based on the experience shared by our colleagues in Australia, who are experiencing their flu season right now and have seen up to 300% increases in demand for influenza vaccines in community pharmacies, it is likely B.C. pharmacies will see increased demand for influenza vaccines this fall. Ensuring pharmacies are supported to maximize access to the influenza vaccine may help mitigate influenza-related hospitalizations and allow hospitals and public health units to continue doing what they have done so well: prioritizing patients and ensuring vulnerable populations have access to care, when and where they need it.

Pharmacies already administer most influenza vaccinations in B.C. and we remain among the most convenient, accessible healthcare providers. With close to 1,400 pharmacies in B.C., we are in virtually every community across the province. Our analysis shows that vaccinations administered through pharmacy are more cost effective than those administered by physicians or in public health clinics. In the 2017/2018 flu season, pharmacies administered about 50% of flu vaccines (55% in 2018/2019). If pharmacies had administered all flu vaccines, we estimate a potential \$6.172 million in savings to the B.C. flu program. Pharmacies currently receive a fee from the Ministry of Health for each vaccination administered to a patient who falls within the set-out guidelines to receive a publicly-funded vaccination. However, the cost to provide this service will be higher due to several factors including physical distancing requirements, enhanced cleaning, and personal protective equipment. We have conducted research and analysis to better understand the additional cost implications of the measures that have been put in place by pharmacies to protect pharmacy staff and the public, and to ensure that pharmacies can continue to provide the highest level of care to British Columbians. A summary of this analysis is attached. Increasing the fees paid by government to cover some of these additional costs will ensure pharmacy can expand their capacity and allow public health clinics to focus on the COVID-19 response and other priorities. By shifting more flu vaccines to pharmacies, the savings incurred could be reinvested in supporting pharmacies delivering this critical service.

*Recommendation #2: Modernize the distribution of influenza vaccines by leveraging the existing pharmacy supply chain to help create capacity in the public health system, minimize shortages and leverage existing distribution networks.*

Public health officials currently direct the distribution of seasonal flu vaccine and other vaccines. This has led to gaps in vaccine distribution and shortages to community pharmacy in recent years.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/spotlights/2018-2019/hospitalization-rates-older.html>



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Additionally, it relies on person-to-person contact between pharmacy and public health staff for the fulfillment of each vaccine order, which presents additional health risks for critical frontline healthcare workers.

Ensuring there is enough flu vaccine in communities to meet demand will be more important than ever this year. Given the expectation for significantly increased demand for the influenza vaccine, it is critical, to have a robust and responsive distribution model in place for vaccines.

The pharmacy supply chain manages access to medications on a daily basis and already has systems in place to predict and react to changes in demand patterns and shortages. The rapid replenishment systems offered by the pharmacy supply chain allow pharmacies to carry less inventory, reducing wastage. There is anecdotal information from other jurisdictions that reduction in waste with wholesale distribution can be as high as 10%, which in itself could self-fund the distribution costs. Providing resources to allow pharmacy to support vaccine distribution through robust and already established supply chains will also create capacity in public health to manage COVID-19 patients and other critical priorities.

*Recommendation #3: Leverage the 1,400 pharmacies throughout the province as the government defines British Columbia's testing strategy to increase access to COVID-19 serology testing.*

As B.C. moves forward with its plan to test widely for COVID-19 antibodies to better understand the extent to which the virus has spread, pharmacy can play an important role supporting public health officials. We believe that our many locations across the province will add important capacity and reach to provincial testing efforts. Pharmacies already administer point-of-care tests in B.C., which are similar to many of the COVID-19 tests already being used in the United Kingdom and United States. As trained healthcare providers, pharmacists can also interpret those tests to allow for timely assessments.

Pharmacies already have an electronic record of all claims processed in B.C. pharmacies. This presents an opportunity to leverage pharmacies' existing digital infrastructure to easily track testing, test results and – eventually – COVID-19 vaccination status. B.C. already has a digital platform with PharmaNet and by collaborating with pharmacy we can ensure that Public Health receives the detailed information they need to manage the pandemic. This information can also readily be shared with the federal government through already existing linkages between PharmaNet and the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI).

These are just some of the ways we feel pharmacy can help government meet the challenges posed by this pandemic. Our sector and organization stand ready to support the government as it navigates the future of healthcare and how it will be delivered.