



**Neighbourhood
Pharmacy**
Association of Canada

Association canadienne
**des pharmacies
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Ontario 2020 Budget Submission

Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation: Allow pharmacists to administer the high-dose flu vaccine and provide a modest increase in the administration fee that will enable pharmacists to appropriately assess patient need to ensure those most at risk receive the high-dose vaccine, and bring Ontario in line with other provinces.

Recommendation: Ensure patients' therapies are being appropriately monitored in real-time for potential toxicities and effectiveness through pharmacist-administered point-of-care testing, such as A1C for diabetes, INR for blood disorders or lipids for cardiovascular health; as well as by providing pharmacists with the ability to order and access lab tests.

Recommendation: Enable patients to see a pharmacist close to home for the assessment and treatment of common ailments such as UTIs, pink eye, cold sores, uncomplicated skin infections, and other minor conditions, as well as the ability to renew prescriptions for up to 12 months. Ensure necessary funding is in place to support pharmacists in delivering this broader scope of services.

Recommendation: Reinvest savings realized through an Ontario biosimilars program to support the provision of critical services delivered by pharmacies to support patient care and ensure that patients receive the greatest value out of the medications prescribed for them.

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.

Recommendation: Government should work with Neighbourhood Pharmacies and other pharmacy stakeholders to modernize the MedsCheck program in a way that achieves better value and benefit for patients.

Recommendation: As the federal and provincial discussions on pharmacare progress, we are requesting that the Ontario 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 Ontarians already receive.

Introduction

Pharmacists are the medication experts working in every community across the province. Our pharmacies are deeply embedded in and committed to the communities they serve. Every day, our pharmacists provide front-line care and medication advice to the people of Ontario—supporting them 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—4,327 of which are serving people across Ontario, including rural and remote communities. We represent the neighbourhood brand, banner and franchise pharmacies, pharmacies servicing patients in long term care homes and those living with complex diseases requiring specialty medications and services, 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 health care solutions.

We support the government’s vision and overarching goal to bring transformation to Ontario’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 Ontario first.

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

Pharmacy and pharmacists are ready and willing to take on a greater role to deliver better, more efficient care in the community for Ontarians. Pharmacy is well-positioned with the ability to streamline services, facilitate improved integration across the health care system, and as a community-based point of care for people experiencing minor health and medication issues. This will allow more people to access care in the community without visiting the hospital emergency room.

Protecting the Health of Ontario Seniors: Accessing High-Dose Flu Vaccine in Pharmacy

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 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-related deaths.

The longer seniors spend bed-ridden or in hospital, the more independence they lose. In many cases, they will never regain the same level of independence and activity they had before their hospitalization, putting an even greater strain on already over-capacity health services such as home care and long-term care.

These impacts of the flu can be detrimental for seniors and their families and greatly compounds the importance of vaccination. Unfortunately, current policies in Ontario have created a barrier to the ability of community-dwelling seniors to access the vaccine that may be most appropriate for them—the high-dose vaccine. This vaccine offers a protective measure that helps ensure seniors can live healthy and independent lives in the community.

Each year, a quarter of a million seniors rely on their community pharmacy for the flu shot, but when the high-dose vaccine was introduced in 2018-19, pharmacies in Ontario were not permitted to administer it. Hundreds of thousands of Ontario seniors were redirected from their pharmacy back to their physician, resulting in an unnecessary increased burden on primary care physicians. We believe this is a potential missed opportunity to vaccinate a vulnerable population due to the inconvenience of scheduling a physician visit and, most importantly, results in a poor experience for patients.

Pharmacy is positioned to help create capacity in the health care system and prepared to continue to do our part towards supporting accessible patient care. Since the introduction of pharmacy-administered vaccinations, we have seen a steady increase in the number of Ontarians who turn to their neighbourhood pharmacy to protect themselves and those closest to them each flu season. Enabling pharmacy to administer the high-dose flu vaccine will improve access for Ontario seniors who need it most, while helping to alleviate overcrowding in primary care and reduce costs through the elimination of unnecessary primary care visits.

We have been encouraged by the time and attention that government has already given to this issue and look forward to continuing to work closely with public and private sector partners to improve access and care for patients. We share government's priority to help seniors remain healthy, active and to live with independence. Neighbourhood Pharmacies' members are ready and willing to take on an even greater role in helping to protect Ontario's seniors from the flu, by offering more choice and ensuring those most at risk receive the high-dose vaccine. Pharmacy can help the Universal Influenza Immunization Program (UIIP) by performing a triage that delivers the most appropriate and cost-effective vaccine to seniors in their neighbourhood pharmacy. Our members have the skills and judgement necessary to support the delivery of this important vaccination for Ontario's most vulnerable seniors.

Recommendation: Allow pharmacists to administer the high-dose flu vaccine and provide a modest increase in the administration fee that will enable pharmacists to appropriately assess patient need to ensure those most at risk receive the high-dose vaccine, and bring Ontario in line with other provinces.

Maximizing Pharmacists Ability to Provide the Highest Quality Front-line Care

Ontario patients receive the best care when health professionals can work to the full scope of their training and expertise. Like many jurisdictions, Ontario is facing growing demands on our health resources and services. If our health system is going to be sustainable and patients are going to get the excellent care they deserve, we must make sure all health professionals are putting their training, knowledge and experience to its best use.

Pharmacists are qualified to do more than dispense pills, yet 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 the people of Ontario we must expand the accessibility of pharmacy services.

Successive provincial governments have examined but fallen short of fully leveraging the health human resources and infrastructure that is currently available in community pharmacies. We have been extremely encouraged by the steps taken by the Ontario government in the 2019 Budget to move forward with modest changes to scope of practice for several health professions. These changes will go a long way to improve access to care and a better patient experience. The province has an opportunity to both better serve the needs of patients and generate savings in the health care budget.

Today, pharmacists are considered the primary providers of medication management services. They are routinely consulted by patients and other health care providers for advice on dosing, effectiveness, and safety.

Pharmacists presently have the scope to renew and adapt chronic prescriptions but, to date, have been reliant on various secondary sources of information to support this very important clinical decision making. This is not conducive to providing effective care, nor is it in the best interests of patients. Enabling pharmacists to use Point of Care tests and ensuring that pharmacists have access to electronic health records and lab tests will support better medication management and clinical decision making, leading to safer, more effective and more efficient outcomes for patients.

Recommendation: Ensure patients' therapies are being appropriately monitored in real-time for potential toxicities and effectiveness through pharmacist-administered point-of-care testing, such as A1C for diabetes, INR for blood disorders or lipids for cardiovascular health; as well as by providing pharmacists with the ability to order and access lab results.

In addition, Ontario is lagging far behind other provincial jurisdictions in addressing, in a timely manner, patients who are suffering from a minor ailment. The patient experience and timeliness to receive care are top of mind to pharmacy professionals; yet all too often, pharmacists hear the frustrations Ontarians have in getting their minor, though highly bothersome, conditions assessed and treated. Patients frequently plead with their pharmacists for assistance. In far too many circumstances, and despite their knowledge of appropriate treatments and protocols by virtue of their training and expertise, pharmacists feel helpless and are obliged to refer the patient to another health care professional. This needlessly takes time away from physicians and other primary care or emergency care providers—time that would be better spent on addressing more complex patient needs.

We are very encouraged by the steps taken by the Ontario government in the 2019 Budget to enable pharmacists to prescribe for minor ailments. Ontario neighbourhood pharmacists support the government's aim to deliver better, more integrated and connected care in the community. We are confident that maximizing the ability of pharmacists to deliver the care that they have the training and expertise to provide will ensure patients receive high-quality care faster, and bring better value to our health care system. We believe that ensuring these services are available through pharmacy – including funding to enable pharmacists to deliver on this broader scope of services – will help relieve the strain on primary care and hospitals, and offer a cost-effective, accessible option for patients in their communities.

Recommendation: Enable patients to see a pharmacist close to home for the assessment and treatment of common ailments such as UTIs, pink eye, cold sores, uncomplicated skin infections, and other minor conditions, as well as the ability to renew prescriptions for up to 12 months. Ensure necessary funding is in place to support pharmacists in delivering this broader scope of services.

Leveraging Savings of an Ontario Biosimilars Program to Improve Drug Access and Patient Care

Neighbourhood Pharmacies recognizes the pressure on government to pay for an increasing number of high cost drugs. We are aware of the impact that even a single medication can have on Ontario's Public Drug Program budget and how high drug costs can compromise other areas of health care delivery where funds could otherwise be invested.

Other Canadian jurisdictions have taken steps to address the pressures of rising drug costs by implementing an evidence-based biosimilars program. We have been working with the Ontario

government as it considers its own biosimilars program and are supportive of government's efforts to contain costs when it comes to publicly funded drugs.

But such financial pressures are not unique to Ontario's public drug program. As a result of Ontario's aging population, our health care system as a whole is faced with increased pressures and costs. Neighbourhood Pharmacies believes that as planning and decisions for Ontario's biosimilars program are made, there is a real opportunity to reinvest the savings realized through a biosimilars program for what matters most—better care for Ontarians in their communities and in their homes.

We understand that drug cost containment is a priority for the government. While neighbourhood pharmacists have no ability to directly impact drug pricing, our members can work with patients to help them transition to less costly, equally appropriate medications so we can maximize every health care dollar and improve care.

Recommendation: Reinvest savings realized through an Ontario biosimilars program to support the provision of critical services delivered by pharmacies to support patient care and ensure that patients receive the greatest value out of the medications prescribed for them.

Improving Safety and Patient Experience for Medical Cannabis

Ontarians receiving cannabis for medical purposes should have access to the same level of expert support, counselling and oversight as any other Ontarian who has been prescribed a medication to manage a medical condition to improve their quality of life. However, in the current environment, this is not the case for most Ontarians.

While cannabis can offer a variety of therapeutic benefits either on its own or as a complement to other treatments, 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, but 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 healthcare professionals, can provide patients with the most current research updates and educate patients on the best medical cannabis treatment options available. As regulated healthcare professionals, pharmacists can also collect data to help monitor the impact of additional medical cannabis research developments.

Pharmacist counselling and support services would provide clinical oversight on such patient care issues as:

- Drug to drug interactions
- Contraindications
- Allergies
- Dosing
- Medical history
- Assessment of patient risk of substance dependence and misuse
- Narcotic monitoring and/or eHealth
- Smoking cessation counselling and harm reduction strategies
- Appropriateness of cannabis therapy – especially important when pharmacists are doing the initial consult to decide whether to recommend cannabis at all to the physician and patient
- Health outcomes and adverse event monitoring

Pharmacies already play a significant role in managing medications and the distribution of controlled products effectively. Like anyone receiving a prescribed medication, Ontarians 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 Ontario 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.

Modernize Ontario's MedsCheck Program for Improved Value and Patient Care

Neighbourhood Pharmacies recognizes that there are opportunities to make the Ontario MedsCheck program more effective and efficient.

We welcome the opportunity to work with government to revise the current MedsCheck program to ensure it is achieving the greatest value and benefit. We envision a program that focuses on improved coordination and integrated transitions in care; that better leverages digital tools and virtual care; and that focuses on patients who will benefit most.

Recommendation: Government should work with Neighbourhood Pharmacies and other pharmacy stakeholders to modernize the MedsCheck program in a way that achieves better value and benefit for patients.

Access to Medication for all Ontarians

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 Ontario government to ensure that all Ontarians have access to the medications they need to live a healthy life.

Recommendation: As the federal and provincial discussions on pharmacare progress, we are requesting that the Ontario 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 Ontarians already receive.

Conclusion

Our members are Ontario'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 Ontario and to improve the patient experience.

We are encouraged by the positive steps that this government has taken to improve care for the people of Ontario. 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—and believe the recommendations proposed will help us to get there. We are ready to continue working with government, our partners, patients and other health providers to achieve this vision.