

# CANADIAN PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION

Pre-Budget Consultations 2016: Growing Our Economy Together

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# Introduction and Overview

Too many Canadians lack equitable access to the medications and pharmacy services they need. To address this shortcoming, we must improve the safety and effectiveness of Canada's drug supply, while investing in health care innovation. In this brief, the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) is pleased to present three recommendations to the Minister of Finance to improve the health of Canadians in Budget 2016.

## Recommendation 1: Improve Drug Access

CPhA calls on the federal government to work with the provinces and territories, health care professionals and other stakeholders to improve drug access and urges the federal government consider a variety of different models and solutions for pharmacare, based on best available evidence, to ensure Canadians have access to the medications and services they need to be healthy. These models and solutions must address coverage gaps between public and private systems, protect Canadians from undue financial hardship, and guarantee access to a stable supply of clinically and cost-effective medications. Furthermore, the inclusion of access to pharmacy services under any pharmacare model is critical to achieving better health outcomes and system-wide cost savings.

## Recommendation 2: Implement a National Plan for e-Prescribing

CPhA calls on the federal government to work with the provinces and territories, health care professionals and other stakeholders to implement a seamless e-prescribing system in Canada. CPhA asks the federal government to support the development and implementation of a common national standard for e-prescribing that ensures that Canadians' prescription information can be more easily shared and accessed between relevant health providers, while respecting patient privacy and confidentiality.

## Recommendation 3: Strengthen the National Immunization Strategy

CPhA welcomes the Liberal Party's commitment to increase funding to the Public Health Agency of Canada by \$15 million in 2016 and 2017, to support a national strategy to increase vaccination rates. Given Canada's relatively low rates of immunization compared to other industrialized countries, CPhA calls on the federal government to revamp the National Immunization Strategy (NIS). The revamped strategy should increase immunization rates through a comprehensive approach that would include further expanding pharmacists' scope of practice to administer vaccines. It should also target research, comparable access and enhanced education and outreach, including building a partnership with the provinces and territories and health professionals to increase public awareness of the importance of vaccinations.

**Pharmacists are Canada's most trusted and accessible health care providers. Every day, pharmacists make a positive difference in the health and well-being of Canadians. Federal action to address these priority issues will provide Canada's 39,000 pharmacists with the tools they need to deliver innovative, accessible, effective and sustainable health care to all Canadians. These are solutions that benefit everyone. Only when Canadians are healthy can they be productive in their jobs, active in their communities, and supportive of their families.**

## More Information

### Canadian Pharmacists Association

Joelle Walker, Director of Government Relations  
1785 Alta Vista Drive, Ottawa, ON K1G 3Y6

☎ 1-613-523-7877 ✉ [jwalker@pharmacists.ca](mailto:jwalker@pharmacists.ca)

[www.pharmacists.ca](http://www.pharmacists.ca)

# 1.Improve Drug Access

Prescription medications can prevent illness, manage symptoms, and even cure disease – making them one of the most cost-effective health interventions available. As leaders in the healthcare field, pharmacists are keenly aware that public policy gaps exist with regard to medication accessibility for patients. A cooperative approach is required by governments, health care provider groups, private payers, and other stakeholders to reduce the barriers for Canadians to access necessary medications.

CPhA believes that measures to improve drug access should address existing gaps in coverage between public and private systems, protect Canadians from undue financial hardship, and guarantee access to a stable supply of clinically and cost-effective medications. All Canadians should have access to pharmacy services, regardless of the province or territory in which they live. Pharmacy services, such as medication management and prescription monitoring, are critical components of safe and effective drug therapy.

CPhA welcomes the Liberal’s commitment to improve drug access for Canadians and urges the federal government to consider a variety of different models of ‘pharmacare’ that will improve drug access, beyond a single-payer universal model. According to a recent independent study, proposals for a single-payer universal model significantly underestimate the burden on taxpayers, with costs to government in the area of \$6.6 billion. In addition, the analysis identifies other consequences associated with a single public payer national pharmacare program, including a significant reduction in the number of drugs covered, longer wait times for reimbursement for new drugs, and reduced incentives for manufacturers to bring innovative medicines to Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Evidence from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) and Canada’s Patented Medicine Price Review Board (PMPRB) clearly shows that growth in drug spending continues to decline.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, governments remain focused on pharmaceutical cost containment, instead of improving care and health outcomes, or value for health dollars. This approach risks missed opportunities for cost savings in other areas of the health system through the impact of pharmacy services like improved medication adherence, early detection, chronic disease management and preventative health measures.

The inclusion of access to pharmacy services under any pharmacare model is critical to achieving better outcomes and cost savings. Access to necessary medications is only one component; patients also require access to the full range of pharmacy services. Pharmacists provide expert advice and guidance to ensure that Canadians have access to appropriate drug therapies.

**RECOMMENDATION** CPhA calls on the federal government to work with the provinces and territories, health care professionals and other stakeholders to improve drug access and urges the federal government consider a variety of different models and solutions for pharmacare, based on best available evidence, to ensure Canadians have access to the medications and services they need to be healthy. These models and solutions must address coverage gaps between public and private systems, protect Canadians from undue financial hardship, and guarantee access to a stable supply of clinically and cost-effective medications. Furthermore, the inclusion of access to pharmacy services under any pharmacare model is critical to achieving better health outcomes and system-wide cost savings.

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<sup>1</sup> *Pharmacare Costing in Canada: Preliminary Report*. 2016. PDCI Market Access Inc. <http://www.pdci.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Pharmacare-Preliminary-Report-PDCI-January-2016.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *PMPRB Annual Public Drug Expenditure Report 2012/13*. 2015. Patented Medicine Price Review Board; *National Health Expenditure Trends, 1975 to 2014*. 2014. Canadian Institute for Health Information. [https://www.cihi.ca/en/nhex\\_2014\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.cihi.ca/en/nhex_2014_report_en.pdf).

## 2. Implement a National Plan for e-Prescribing

E-prescribing (also known as e-Rx) is the electronic sharing of prescription information between health providers. It is a means of communicating important prescription information between pharmacists, physicians, nurses, and other relevant providers. At a time when most information in our country is shared electronically, the vast majority of prescribed medication information is still shared via handwritten prescriptions.

E-prescribing has a positive impact on patient care and safety. When properly implemented, e-prescribing reduces the possibility of errors, reduces back and forth communication between health care providers, and allows for the integration of safety and alert systems when prescriptions are issued. These benefits not only accrue to the patient individually, but also to the overall health care system, by increasing the safety of dispensing and monitoring of medication therapy. E-prescribing also helps to inform decision-making by making medication history, drug, therapeutic, formulary and cost information available at the point of prescribing.<sup>3</sup>

Health Canada has been clear in its support for the use of e-prescribing, stating that “[t]here are significant benefits associated with the implementation of e-Rx including the potential to reduce the incidence of medication and dispensing errors caused by illegible prescriptions, a potential decline in adverse drug reactions and the timely transmission of prescription information from practitioner to pharmacist. Health Canada recognizes these benefits and supports the implementation of e-Rx.”

Despite strong support for e-prescribing, there is no question that Canada lags far behind in its use. In a 2014 survey of pharmacists conducted by CPhA and Canada Health Infoway, when pharmacists were asked to estimate the percentage of total weekly prescriptions received in their pharmacy through an e-prescribing system, 88% of respondents said “never”, with a further 8% saying less than 10% of the time. When asked what improvements an e-prescribing system would bring, pharmacists cited increasing productivity and less time required to process prescriptions, better accuracy in the quality of prescription information and enhanced interprofessional collaboration – in short, better and more effective care for patients.<sup>4</sup>

The federal government should work with key stakeholders, including the provinces and territories, to develop a common national standard for e-prescribing, and then develop a plan to implement that standard. Ensuring patient confidentiality must be central to these efforts.

**RECOMMENDATION** CPhA calls on the federal government to work with the provinces/territories, health care professionals and other stakeholders to implement a seamless e-prescribing system in Canada. CPhA asks the federal government to support the development and implementation of a common national standard for e-prescribing that ensures that Canadians’ prescription information can be more easily shared and accessed between relevant health providers, while respecting patient privacy and confidentiality.

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<sup>3</sup> “Recommendations for the Implementation of Electronic Prescriptions in Canada”, Canadian Pharmacists Association and Canadian Association of Chain Drug Stores, 2009. Available at [www.pharmacists.ca/cpha-ca/assets/File/cpha-on-the-issues/PPePrescriptionImplementation.pdf](http://www.pharmacists.ca/cpha-ca/assets/File/cpha-on-the-issues/PPePrescriptionImplementation.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> “Final Report: Survey of Canadian Community Pharmacists: Use of Digital Health Technologies in Practice”, Commissioned by the Canadian Pharmacists Association and Canada Health Infoway, 2014. Available at <https://www.infoway-inforoute.ca/en/what-we-do/news-events/newsroom/2014-news-releases/6312-community-pharmacists-recognize-the-opportunity-in-digital-health>.

### 3. Strengthen Canada's National Immunization Strategy

Child immunization rates in Canada are falling short of herd immunity and Canada's immunization coverage goals, according to recently released national data on immunization rates. In fact, 23% of children are not receiving the full four recommended doses of the diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus vaccine by age two. While a large majority of Canadian children are immunized against common illness such as measles, mumps, rubella, meningitis and polio, Canada is still falling behind on the issue of early childhood immunization, placing 28th out of 29 comparator countries, according to a 2013 UNICEF report. Clearly there is room for improvement.

CPhA welcomes the Liberal Party's commitment to increase funding to the Public Health Agency of Canada by \$15 million in 2016 and 2017, to support a national strategy to increase vaccination rates. Although Canada previously had a National Immunization Strategy in place, there are gaps that must be addressed. For instance, Canada is without a national immunization registry. Canada also lacks a harmonized routine immunization schedule. Additional promotion and communication regarding the importance of immunization to public health is sorely needed. Public funding for a range of early childhood immunizations should be a priority. And although some provincial immunization and vaccination data is available, it is not harmonized across provincial and territorial jurisdictions, and therefore the establishment of pan-Canadian reporting standards needs to be a priority.

According to the 2015 report *Community Pharmacy: Trends and Insights*, 73% of pharmacies across Canada currently provide some form of immunization services, even though immunization authority for pharmacists has been in place for only a few years. Pharmacy has demonstrated that it has the capacity and willingness to play a central role in the implementation of a National Immunization Strategy (NIS). As part of this strategy, pharmacists in all jurisdictions, including pharmacists who provide care to federal populations, should be granted greater immunization authority, and compensated appropriately.

The call for a strengthened pan-Canadian NIS is not new. Organizations such as the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Pediatric Society, Immunize Canada, and many other national health stakeholders have long called for such a Strategy. Given its central importance to the maintenance of public health, pharmacists are calling on the federal government to commit to a multi-pronged, multi-stakeholder NIS, with pharmacists playing a key role.

**RECOMMENDATION** Given Canada's relatively low rates of immunization compared to other industrialized countries, CPhA calls on the federal government to revamp the National Immunization Strategy (NIS). The revamped strategy should increase immunization rates through a comprehensive approach that would include further expanding pharmacists' scope of practice to administer vaccines. It would also target research, comparable access and enhanced education and outreach, including building a partnership with the provinces and territories and health professionals to increase public awareness of the importance of vaccinations.