



CPhA Pre-Budget Consultation Brief 2023

Investing in Community-Based Care

Ongoing Health Human Resources (HHR) challenges across Canada have continued to negatively impact our health-care system and everyday Canadians. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada's 45,000 pharmacists and pharmacy teams have stepped in to deliver care to Canadians right in their own community.

Throughout the pandemic, pharmacists have:

- Provided over 17 million COVID-19 vaccines
- Stayed open to the public when other primary care settings were closed
- Provided services to fill health care related gaps and better support patients such as:
 - Enhanced care for patients who use opioids and other controlled substances
 - Maintaining access to addiction therapies (e.g., Methadone, suboxone)
 - Assessing and prescribing for common ailments
 - Expanded vaccine authority and administering to young children
 - COVID-19 testing and information

When empowered to practice to the full extent of their scope, pharmacists can reduce the pressures on Canada's struggling primary care networks and make care more accessible to Canadians. Investments in community-based care are essential to shoring up our health-care system and will support pharmacies in maintaining the level of service that Canadians have come to expect.

Recommendations

We recommend the federal government invest in four key area in Budget 2023:



1. Enhancing HHR strategies federally and provincially to strengthen the recruitment and retention of health care workers

It is critical that the federal government invest in an HHR strategy that includes all health care providers and provide targeted funding to ensure the needs of patients are being met at the right time, in their own communities. We urge the government to support the following HHR priorities:

- Prioritize immigration of health care workers and increase funding and resources to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to clear the backlog of applications.
- Provide \$200 million over two years towards a federal program to subsidize employers providing experience and training to internationally trained health care workers, including pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.



- Provide funding to provinces and territories to support the training of new health care workers, including pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.



2. Expand the rural and remote student loan forgiveness program to include pharmacists

Pharmacists continue to provide care to Canadians right in their community and play a critical role in allowing Canadians in all corners of Canada to access the prescription drugs and medications they need. Like all HHR professions, pharmacies continue to face significant recruitment and retention challenges in rural and remote communities. At the same time, tuition fees for pharmacy schools are comparable to medical schools (both programs have yearly average tuition fees averaging around \$19,000) meaning that pharmacists take on debt loads similar levels to those coming out of medical school. CPhA strongly urges the federal government to:

- Expand the eligible professions under the rural and remote student loan forgiveness program to include pharmacists.
- Include pharmacists in the same category as physicians under the expanded program, in recognition of the high educational costs.



3. Invest in community-based care to support Canada's primary care network

Many of the current health crises felt in emergency rooms and acute care settings are also being felt at the community level. CPhA believes that in order to fill the gaps in the ongoing HHR crisis, it is necessary to increase investments in community-based care. As the most accessible health care workers to average Canadians, pharmacists are uniquely positioned to provide a wide range of health care services when empowered to practice to the full extent of their scope. A recent survey conducted by Abacus Data on behalf of CPhA found that 85% of Canadians believe pharmacists are currently underutilized in our health care system. In addition, 95% of Canadians believe governments need to invest in community-based care, with 89% of Canadians agreeing their local pharmacist is more accessible than nurses or doctors in the health care system.

The vast majority of Canadians (90%) think pharmacists can help address gaps in care caused by the current shortage of health-care providers. Specifically, when it comes to the health services that pharmacists could provide, Canadians see a larger role when it comes to vaccinations (61%), prescribing for common ailments/conditions (53%), testing and lab services (47%), and 48% of women see a larger role in contraception prescribing.

Therefore, CPhA urges the federal government to:

- Increase Canada Health Transfers (CHTs) contingent on specific conditions, criteria and goals to expand access to community-based care.



4. Implement a mixed payer pharmacare program

Existing drug coverage in Canada, through public and private programs, has resulted in 88% of Canadians having comprehensive prescription drug coverage. However, according to a 2017 PBO report, *Federal Costs of National Pharmacare Program*, an estimated only 2% of Canadians lack drug insurance coverage and 10% of Canadians who have coverage, lack the financial means to pay for their prescriptions. A mixed public-private program that fills the gaps in existing coverage, while recognizing the pan-Canadian nature of Canada's health care system will result in all Canadians having broad coverage, with the least disruption and cost to the existing system. We recommend that the federal government:

- Work with provinces and territories to develop a funding formula through the CHT, with specific targets and objectives, to enhance drug coverage within their own jurisdictions.
- Ensure that pharmaceutical care remains a critical pillar of any pharmacare plan

About CPhA

The Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) is the uniting national voice of pharmacy and the pharmacist profession in Canada. As pharmacists undertake an enhanced role in the delivery of health-care services, CPhA ensures that the profession is recognized as a national leader in health care, influencing the policies, programs, budgets and initiatives affecting the profession and the health of Canadians. More information is available at www.pharmacists.ca.

For more information, contact:

Adam Wilson
Director, Government Relations
Canadian Pharmacists Association
awilson@pharmacists.ca