



CPhA FINA Pre-Budget Consultation 2024

Strengthening Health Care for Canadians

Ongoing Health Human Resources (HHR) challenges across Canada are negatively impacting our health care system and everyday Canadians.

As we continue to face HHR challenges, governments across Canada are calling on pharmacists by allowing them to practice to the full extent of their scope and provide primary care, to fill in the gaps in our health care system.

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. Now is the time to strengthen our health care system by making investments in pharmacy, to allow Canadians to access the care they need, in their own communities.

Recommendations

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



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. Pharmacists, much like other health care professions, are experiencing shortages due to retirements, burnout, and lack of new professionals entering into the health care workforce. 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, and include pharmacists as part of the government's new Express Entry program.
- 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.



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

Pharmacists are providing 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 are facing 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 is disappointed the government has not expanded the rural and remote student loan forgiveness program to date, and 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.



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 provide long-term permanent funding 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.
- Consult with the provinces, territories and First Nations groups prior to introducing pharmacare legislation.



Make Sexual and Reproductive Health a Permanent Priority

In Budget 2023, the government took a meaningful step in support of sexual health by re-investing in the Health Canada Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund. This Fund is supporting valuable research and partnerships to address barriers to sexual health. We therefore call on the government to:

- Make the Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund permanent.



Fund Tools and Monitoring to Prevent and Mitigate Drug Shortages

Drug shortages across Canada have created challenges for the health care sector, from pharmacists to patients to prescribers. Over the last two years we have seen significant shortages for both prescription and non-prescription medications. CPhA has played a prominent role in providing timely information on drug shortages to Health Canada, while helping Canadians manage shortages. With further investment in the CPhA, we would be able to better serve Canadians by mitigating and preventing future shortages. We therefore call on the government of Canada to:

- Provide the Canadian Pharmacists Association with \$150,000 over the next three years to monitor shortages on pharmacy shelves through member surveys and response dissemination, while building up a key list of pharmacies ready and willing to provide CPhA and Health Canada with information on potential shortages from front-line pharmacy.
- Provide the Canadian Pharmacists Association with \$200,000 over the next three years to create alternative drug tables to assist prescribers and pharmacists with drug substitutions, and communicate and distribute these tables to the front-lines.

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.

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