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CPHA PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION BRIEF 2021

Pharmacists for Improved Patient Care During and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic



CPhA Recommendations

1. Preparing for the upcoming flu season

To increase flu vaccination rates across Canada this coming season, CPhA recommends that the federal government:

- Implement an ambitious and dynamic public awareness campaign
- Ensure an adequate supply of the flu vaccine
- Ensure that all health providers delivering flu vaccines have a sufficient supply of PPE and the appropriate remuneration for flu vaccination services to cover the additional costs of PPE, extra cleaning measures and other protections during the COVID-19 pandemic.



2. Equitable access to pharmacy services for patients covered under NIHB

To improve access to and coverage for health care services for First Nations, Métis and Inuit patients, CPhA recommends that the following pharmacist-delivered health services be covered under the NIHB:

- Renew or extend prescriptions
- Provide medication reviews
- Initiate prescription medication

We further recommend that a pilot project be implemented to bring pharmacists into remote Indigenous communities to provide regular clinics.



3. Positive developments in patient care as a result of COVID-19

CPhA recommends that the federal government invest in research to measure the impact of pharmacy practice advances during COVID-19 on patient access to care and outcomes. We would also urge the government to work closely with provincial and territorial governments across Canada to make such advances permanent in order to achieve long-term improvements to patient care in Canada.



Introduction

On behalf of the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) and Canada's 45,000 pharmacists, we are pleased to provide the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance with our recommendations for Budget 2021.

Like all Canadians, we look forward to a full recovery from the pandemic and the rebuilding of the Canadian economy. However, we believe this cannot be achieved without the continued prioritization of the health and safety of Canadians. Our recommendations, therefore, focus on improving patient care in Canada by acknowledging the exceptional ways in which pharmacists have adapted to respond to the needs of their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and supporting pharmacists in expanding their role as medication experts, clinical service providers and public health stewards now and in the post-pandemic future.



Preparing for the upcoming flu season



As the COVID-19 pandemic persists, Canadian governments are understandably anxious to continue to reopen the economy while containing the virus as much as possible. This delicate balance will be challenged by the upcoming flu season.

Pharmacists can now provide vaccines in all jurisdictions across Canada except Nunavut and Northwest Territories. This has helped increase uptake of the flu vaccine in recent years and pharmacies are now where most people go to receive their flu shots.¹ However, Canada is still far below the 80% coverage target for those most at risk of influenza complications and hospitalizations.² And these high-risk patients — seniors and Canadians with chronic diseases — are those who are also most at risk of severe effects from COVID-19.

In order to avoid being overwhelmed by a resurgence of COVID-19 as well as a difficult flu season, we are calling on the federal government to help ensure that more Canadians than ever are able to receive the flu vaccine. Our health care system simply could not withstand these two health crises simultaneously and we must do everything possible to protect vulnerable patients from being co-infected by these viruses.

To increase flu vaccination rates across Canada this coming season, CPhA recommends the following:

The implementation of an ambitious and dynamic public awareness campaign

The federal government should adopt new and innovative tactics to inform the public of the increased importance of receiving the flu vaccine early this season, where to get the vaccine and what to expect.

Efforts to ensure an adequate supply of the flu vaccine

The government should ensure that Canada has an adequate supply of the flu vaccine for the coming season.³ Many provinces dealt with vaccine delays and shortages during the 2019-20 flu season. The consequences of this happening again during the COVID-19 pandemic would be catastrophic. The government should also work closely with provinces/territories to enable more flexible supply policies, such as allowing providers and health care facilities to order more vaccine supply than usual.

Personal protective equipment and additional protections for all flu vaccine providers

Sourcing personal protective equipment (PPE) has been an ongoing challenge for pharmacists during the COVID-19 pandemic. Protecting patients and pharmacy staff will become even more important during the flu season as pharmacies are patients' top choice of flu vaccine providers. The federal government should, therefore, work with jurisdictions to ensure that all health providers delivering flu vaccines have a sufficient supply of PPE and the appropriate remuneration for flu vaccination services to cover the additional costs of PPE, extra cleaning measures and other protections during the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ Public Health Agency of Canada. Vaccine uptake in Canadian Adults 2019.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/2018-2019-influenza-flu-vaccine-coverage-survey-results.html>

² Ibid.

³ Vaccine delays, shortages possible across Canada as flu season approaches. CBC News. October 2, 2019.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/flu-shot-delay-shortage-1.5306600>

Equitable access to pharmacy services for patients covered under NIHB



CPhA has long been a proponent of equitable access to health care for First Nations, Métis and Inuit covered under the federal Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program. In most places across Canada, pharmacists are increasingly delivering new and important health services closer to home. Such services include medication management services, such as medication reviews, and pharmacist prescribing for common ailments. While these services are covered under provincial drug plans, patients covered under the NIHB are still not able to access these and other pharmacy services.

During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadians were asked to stay home as much as possible or remain close to home. Many physician offices and other primary health care providers were forced to close. Pharmacies across Canada were designated as essential services and remained open, allowing pharmacists to continue to provide care to vulnerable patients, including virtual services, and fill some of the care gaps left by other health care service closures.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the accessibility of pharmacy services and the ability of pharmacists to provide virtual care (e.g. by telephone) to even the most remote patients. It has also demonstrated how First Nations, Métis and Inuit patients, who often live in rural and remote communities, could benefit from these services in normal circumstances but especially during a pandemic situation. These patients deserve equitable access to pharmacist-delivered services and care under the NIHB.

To improve access to and coverage for health care services for First Nations, Métis and Inuit patients, CPhA recommends that the following pharmacist-delivered health services be covered under the NIHB:

- **Renew or extend prescriptions** if patients are not be able to see or reach their prescribing doctor or nurse practitioner.
- **Provide medication reviews** to optimize medication use, prevent medication-related problems, improve adherence and reduce waste.
- **Initiate prescription medication** for common ailments like allergies, hemorrhoids, cold sores or for other common needs like nicotine dependence and hormonal contraception.

We further recommend that a **pilot project** be implemented, similar to that of the Paramedic Association of Canada, to bring pharmacists into remote Indigenous communities to provide regular clinics. Like paramedics, pharmacists have the skills and expertise to identify health and, specifically, medication-related problems and provide the appropriate interventions to keep patients healthy and out of hospitals. Such early interventions would prevent costly hospital admissions and the associated travel requirements, which are a heavy burden on both Indigenous patients and the health care system.

Positive developments in patient care as a result of COVID-19



COVID-19 has undeniably challenged the Canadian health care system. Beyond the direct struggle of hospitals caring for patients with COVID-19, elsewhere in the health care system patients and providers have had to cope with clinic closures, delayed care and surgeries, drug shortages and limited access to protective equipment. Despite these challenges, COVID-19 has led to some positive developments in health care as it has forced all stakeholders in the system, from government to health care providers, to adapt and identify new and innovative ways to deliver patient care.

A few examples of how COVID-19 has led to advances within the pharmacy profession are the temporary exemptions to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA), allowing pharmacists to better provide continuity of care for patients prescribed opioids and other controlled drugs; the expansion of virtual care, and pharmacist testing for COVID-19:

Temporary exemptions to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA)

The CDSA exemptions allow pharmacists to extend prescriptions for controlled drugs and substances, transfer prescriptions to other pharmacists, receive verbal orders and allowing other pharmacy employees to deliver prescriptions of controlled substances to patients' homes or wherever they may be self-isolating. Newly published CDSA interpretations by Health Canada have also helped expand the authority of pharmacists in some provinces to adapt prescriptions for controlled drugs and substances (e.g. adjust the formulation, dose and regimen).

Virtual care

While the scope of virtual care varies by province and the technology available in each pharmacy, pharmacists in Canada have been authorized to provide telephone or video consults in order to provide medication counselling, medication reviews, care plans, deprescribing consultations, extend prescriptions, prescribe for minor ailments, demonstrate the use of medical devices, and other services such as witnessing the ingestion of opioid agonist treatment.

COVID-19 assessments, information and testing

Early in the pandemic, pharmacists in Alberta were given a direct public health role providing patient assessments, information and care related to COVID-19. Since late June, many of Alberta's community pharmacies have also been offering asymptomatic COVID-19 testing, made possible through compensation from the Alberta government.

Despite the burden that COVID-19 has placed on all areas of the health care system, it has also led to much-needed advances in patient care and access to medication management services offered by pharmacists. However, most of these advances have been deemed temporary measures during the pandemic by provincial/territorial governments and colleges of pharmacy.

The pandemic has demonstrated that pharmacists have a unique position in primary health care and are able to serve diverse roles as medication experts, clinical service providers and public health stewards.

We strongly recommend that the federal government invest in research to measure the impact of pharmacy practice advances during COVID-19 on patient access to care and outcomes. We would also urge the government to work closely with provincial and territorial governments across Canada to make such advances permanent in order to achieve long-term improvements to patient care in Canada.

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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