



March 12, 2020

Dear First Ministers

As you convene in Ottawa to discuss the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, we would urge you to consider the fragility of our drug supply and the danger a global pandemic poses to Canadians who depend on this supply for their health and well-being. Canada has been struggling with drug shortages, recalls and discontinuations for many years. While none of our current drug shortages are believed to be directly linked to COVID-19, we fear we may soon feel the impact of global coronavirus containment strategies on manufacturing and trade.

To mitigate any risk to the Canadian drug supply as a result of COVID-19, we strongly recommend that Canada begin to make necessary preparations. Among other tactics, this should include increased drug supply monitoring and the development of a list of essential medicines to help prioritize shortage relief efforts. We also continue to urge the Canadian government to support research and work with experts and international leaders to identify policy options to prevent future drug shortages.

The potential for shortages is being compounded by messaging to Canadians that they should stockpile food and medications. Pharmacists do not recommend this. If there is a disruption in the supply of medications, pharmacists will need to manage their stock carefully to ensure that all patients can receive a quantity of the medication to meet their immediate needs. Unnecessary stockpiling of medication and medical supplies, such as masks and other protective equipment, can create unintended shortages and put other patient and health care workers' health at risk. We are asking governments to help us communicate to Canadians that stockpiling is not recommended.

Finally, as pharmacists are the most accessible health care providers in the country and in communities, they will be on the front line of this pandemic as patients present themselves to pharmacies for increased screening. This will likely grow as Canadians are told to stay out of emergency rooms and physician offices. It is therefore imperative that governments include pharmacists in pandemic planning efforts and ensure they are allocated the proper protections and resources.

Yours sincerely

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Chair

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