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Canadian  
Pharmacists  
Association

Association des  
pharmaciens  
du Canada

# The Weekly

Bringing the world of pharmacy together

## July 19, 2023

### CPhA

#### ***Pharmacist prescribing across Canada***

Pharmacists in Canada have seen their prescribing powers expand significantly recently. Currently, all pharmacists across Canada have some level of prescribing authority but this varies by jurisdiction. [This new chart](#) provides a detailed look at pharmacists' prescribing authority in each province and territory. Future updates to the chart will include information on the availability of public funding for the conditions and other categories included in the scan.

#### ***July/August CPJ***

Looking for the perfect pharmacy-related addition to your summer reading list? The July/August issue of the *Canadian Pharmacists Journal* is [online now!](#) Check out the latest pharmacy content and research on topics like pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV, dispensing mifepristone for medical abortion, and tensions between Western and Indigenous worldviews in pharmacy education.

## Pharmacy on the front lines

### ***Behind the scenes: Sunnybrook's pharmacy quality control lab***

Every hospital pharmacy faces issues regarding drug stability and compatibility, but few hospital pharmacies are positioned to conduct studies to address these gaps and translate results to practice. Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto, ON, is home to [the province's only hospital pharmacy quality control lab](#). Led by pharmacist Nathan Ma and supported by Shirley Law, the lab works to reduce drug wastage, support clinical trials and navigate drug shortages. Since its inception in the 1980s, the lab has conducted nearly 100 studies that have saved health-care systems across the world millions of dollars. One recent example is a drug compatibility study performed by the lab that demonstrated a new brand of the drug leucovorin is compatible with oxaliplatin—as part of a standard treatment for colorectal cancer. The use of this brand will save the hospital \$277,000 annually and the findings have been disseminated nationally to impact practice recommendations. “It’s satisfying to see that our work at the Pharmacy Quality Control Lab doesn’t just benefit Sunnybrook or Toronto or Canada, but also colleagues around the world,” Ma said.

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## Provincial

### ***Recent pharmacy robberies in Waterloo region renewing concerns***

A big bust for the Waterloo Regional Police Service in Waterloo, ON, is renewing concerns for pharmacist safety, [CTV News reports](#). The spree began Sunday night and involved robberies at pharmacies around Waterloo region. Police say the recent robberies brings the number of pharmacies hit this year in the region to 7. “I think it’s partly a by-product of what we experienced with the opioid epidemic crisis,” said Justin Bates, CEO of the Ontario Pharmacists Association. It’s a concern across the country and Bates said young offenders are getting involved. Several minors were arrested by regional police in relation to the recent spree. In March, the Ontario College of Pharmacists acted on the persistent problem, mandating time-delayed narcotics safes in pharmacies to help prevent robberies. Bates said pharmacies have been given a grace period

to comply with the mandate “in order to either retrofit an existing safe with the time-delay components” or “to buy a new safe.”

### ***BC maintains COVID-19 vaccine mandate for health-care workers***

BC's ministry of health has confirmed the COVID-19 vaccine requirement for health-care workers in the public system and care homes stands—a clarification it's making in the wake of confusion over a bureaucratic change, [CTV News reports](#). On July 14, the office of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) published a notice that regulators and colleges of health-care professionals are not required to collect the vaccination status of nurses, dentists, psychologists, doctors and others, but that doesn't change the fact the workers must be vaccinated. British Columbia is one of the few provinces to maintain a requirement for publicly employed health-care professionals to be vaccinated against the virus. A representative from Dr. Bonnie Henry's office has confirmed there's no change to the mandate, describing the July 14 notice as a bureaucratic change around record-keeping of vaccination rates. The colleges are still expected to collect vaccination information, but are no longer required to by PHO order.

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## **National**

### ***Long COVID presents ‘unfathomable’ burden as health-care system reaches ‘boiling point’***

A new paper warns long COVID, which affects millions of people globally, presents an “unfathomable” burden to patients, health-care providers, governments and economies, [Global News reports](#). The report, called “The Immunology of long COVID” and published by the science journal *Nature* on July 11, draws on other peer-reviewed articles to state the disease is “multi-organ [and] multisystem,” that even infections without symptoms can cause organ damage, that there is evidence it causes micro blood clots, and that SARS-CoV-2—the virus which causes COVID-19—can remain in a person's body. And besides the perhaps best-known symptoms like fatigue and brain fog, long COVID also appears to increase the risk of stroke, heart attacks and diabetes. While different studies around the world have found different findings,

the general consensus, the paper states, is that 10% of everyone who gets infected with SARS-CoV-2 suffers from long COVID.

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## International

### ***US: First over-the-counter birth control pill gets FDA approval***

On July 13, federal regulators approved the US's first over-the-counter birth control pill in a landmark decision that will soon allow American women and girls to obtain contraceptive medication as easily as they buy aspirin and eye drops, [the Associated Press reports](#). The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) cleared Opill to be sold without a prescription, making it the first such medication to be moved out from behind the pharmacy counter. The manufacturer, Ireland-based Perrigo, won't start shipping the pill until early next year, and there will be no age restrictions on sales. Hormone-based pills have long been the most common form of birth control in the US used by tens of millions of women since the 1960s. Until now, all of them required a prescription. Medical societies and women's health groups have pushed for wider access for decades, noting that an estimated 45% of the 6 million annual pregnancies in the US are unintended.

### ***Ireland: Pharmacists say they can take on over 1 million doctor's appointments a year***

Irish pharmacists have warned that medical card holders are needlessly taking up 1 million doctor's appointments a year by having to get a prescription for over-the-counter medicines to treat minor ailments, [the Irish Independent reports](#). The prescription is necessary to get the over-the-counter treatment for free. But pharmacists insist they could safely replace the general practitioner in caring for a patient with a range of minor conditions, including sore throat, hay fever, headaches and sinusitis, and provide the free medication directly without prescription. "A flagship innovation could be the introduction of a national minor ailment scheme. Under this scheme, public patients with minor self-limiting conditions would no longer have to make and wait for [general practitioner] appointments," said Susan O'Dwyer, the Irish Pharmacy Union's head of professional services. "Instead, they would consult with their local community

pharmacy team, receive an assessment of their symptoms followed by a combination of advice, medication supply and or referral to other services.”

### ***Australia: PSA welcomes Queensland’s sudden announcement of free flu shots***

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) has welcomed the Queensland government’s announcement of state-wide, no-cost influenza vaccinations for everyone, beginning July 22, [the Australian Journal of Pharmacy reports](#) (subscription access only). The government’s sudden decision comes after a huge spike in cases of influenza B in recent weeks. There is currently no clear picture of how the free vaccine service will be remunerated, but it’s expected to be announced before the free vaccines become available this weekend. Shane MacDonald, PSA’s Queensland president, said the move will encourage more Queenslanders to make influenza vaccination a part of their regular health care. “Removing cost barriers and giving Queenslanders greater access to vaccines through community pharmacies is a great first step to improving vaccine uptake,” he said. “Our message to all Queenslanders is simple: visit your local pharmacist and get your influenza vaccine.”

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## **Worth Repeating**

“The [influenza] vaccine doesn’t always prevent someone from getting the flu, but it can prevent them from getting really sick. And the bigger thing that it can do is prevent people from transmitting the flu.” —Barry Power, CPhA’s editor-in-chief, [on the low influenza immunization rates that are creating a difficult flu season for children in Australia](#) and what this means for Canada

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This weekly update is compiled by the Canadian Pharmacists Association. While we aim to ensure all information contained in this update is accurate, CPhA does not take responsibility for the content provided by other organizations and sources.