



PHARMACY
ASSOCIATION
OF SASKATCHEWAN

Pharmacists call on the Province to work together toward a contract that recognizes their role as essential to community health care

When the pandemic emerged in Saskatchewan last March, pharmacists were quick to meet that challenge.

We stayed open and we stayed on course. We served our patients, our communities, and our health care system while we continued to collaborate effectively with the Province on pandemic care and seek a negotiated new contract.

Pharmacists remain dedicated to the provision of essential community health care, working in good faith, while governed by the terms of our Ministry of Health (MOH) contract that expired over a year ago.

But our reality today is completely different from a year ago.

Since March, pharmacies have adapted and expanded services to limit exposure risk and provide essential community health care. According to research conducted by the Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada (NPAC), Saskatchewan pharmacies invested over \$34 million in facility and process adaptations in the first 13 weeks of the pandemic, with continuing costs estimated at \$2.5 million per week.

As dedicated as we are, this is not sustainable, particularly with flu season gaining momentum and COVID-19 cases spiking upward.

We must prepare together to make the best use of all our capabilities.

The pharmacy sector has a long history of collaborative, constructive negotiations with the Province. We seek only to strengthen that relationship, and to maintain effective collaboration with the Province to advance the province's Connected Care strategy, the objective of which is to ensure patients receive *the right care at the right time from the right health care provider as close to home as possible*¹.

If we fail to develop a sustainable, fair contract that reflects the role of pharmacy in meeting emerging health care needs, patients may face lost services and some communities may lose their pharmacies. In opinion research conducted by the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) last April, three out of four Saskatchewan

¹ *Health Networks in Saskatchewan Fact Sheet*, Saskatchewan Health, Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA), Saskatchewan Medical Association (SMA), Sept., 2019, www.saskhealthauthority.ca/Services-Locations/Health-Networks-Team-Based-Care/Documents/KMsQAHealthNetworksPhysicians.pdf.

respondents reported concerns about pharmacies closing as a result of pandemic pressures.

We also risk losing ground in other ways. Today, it is a normal part of routine pharmacy services to administer flu vaccines. From a standing start in 2015, we have grown the pharmacy role in vaccine administration, with pharmacists now providing over 50% of flu shots. This is a real win for patients and the health care system.

Throughout the pandemic, pharmacies are serving more patients who are remaining as close to home as possible most of the time, sheltering in place. This takes some demand pressure away from hospitals, clinics, and doctors' offices, and these facilities may then allocate care more beneficially. This is a critical contribution when these services may be experiencing pandemic-related bottlenecks.

Pharmacists stand ready to build on these gains, and we must be recognized for this contribution. We cannot afford to invest in our operations and shoulder significant, unanticipated costs of front-line health care indefinitely.

We ask that the Province resume negotiations on a contract that respects the sector's contribution and reflects today's reality. We must make this a priority for patient care and the health care system more generally. We must work together to manage the risks we face and build on the progress we have made towards the fulfillment of the promise of Connected Care in Saskatchewan.

George Furneaux, Board Chair
Pharmacy Association of Saskatchewan

¹ *Health Networks in Saskatchewan Fact Sheet*, Saskatchewan Health, Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA), Saskatchewan Medical Association (SMA), Sept., 2019, www.saskhealthauthority.ca/Services-Locations/Health-Networks-Team-Based-Care/Documents/KMsQAHealthNetworksPhysicians.pdf.