

American and Canadian pharmacist associations warn that drug importation policies could put patients at risk

The Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) and the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) are issuing a joint statement in opposition to U.S. federal legislation authorizing personal and commercial importation of prescription drugs from Canada. While we recognize the desire to address affordability issues in the U.S., we strongly oppose the importation of prescription drugs from Canada because of the risks these policies pose to patient safety and continuity of care.

As pharmacists, patient safety and optimal medication use are among our top concerns when providing care. When pharmacists dispense medications, they review and assess all available health information to ensure that medications are safe and appropriate for their patients. This includes identifying possible drug interactions and other adverse events and communicating and resolving any concerns with the patients' prescribers.

Canadian pharmacies may only dispense medications prescribed by a Canadian prescriber. This regulation is in place to protect the safety of patients by ensuring that physicians and pharmacists have established relationships with their patients and knowledge of their medical histories. As such, recently proposed personal drug importation policies pose additional challenges which have not been contemplated. For example, in order for U.S. patients to obtain their medication from a Canadian pharmacy, they would need to see a Canadian physician directly or have a co-signed prescription from a U.S. and Canadian physician with whom the patient has an established relationship. These processes can lead to fragmented care and pose safety issues for the patient as their Canadian physician and pharmacist may not have access to their full health record.

In addition to potentially exacerbating legitimate supply chain issues, such as Canadian drug shortages and recalls, that impact patient safety, importation policies may encourage patients to purchase medications from online pharmacies. Some online pharmacies are entities selling counterfeit drugs and operating outside Canadian and American laws. These entities are difficult to detect and control due their sophistication and the large number in operation. Should the importation policies advance in U.S. federal legislation, we anticipate an influx of U.S. patients receiving illicit, counterfeit or otherwise harmful products from websites posing as Canadian online pharmacies. As organizations representing Canadian and American pharmacists, CPhA and APhA are eager to protect patients and clarify the implications of drug importation policies on patients and health care providers in our countries.