



NEWS RELEASE

Newfoundland and Labrador Residents View Pharmacists Most Positively Amongst Canadians, More Likely to Say Pharmacists Play Essential Role

Abacus Data survey shows high level of continued support for truly universal flu shot program, support for pharmacists' role in responding to opioid crisis

March 8, 2017 (St. John's, NL): According to a new national survey by Abacus Data, conducted to coincide with Pharmacist Awareness Month, 97% of Newfoundland and Labrador's residents have a positive impression of pharmacists, three points higher than the Canadian average, and higher than impressions of doctors, teachers, military officers and police officers. Almost three quarters of the province's residents (72%) view pharmacists as essential to the health care system, compared to 57% nationally. Almost all the province's residents (96%) see the role of pharmacists as essential or important.

"The people of Newfoundland and Labrador greatly value their pharmacists and the role they play in the healthcare system, which has expanded significantly in recent years," said Steve Gillingham, President, Pharmacists' Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL). "This reflects the quality care pharmacists provide in communities throughout every region of our province. They are the most accessible health professional and are vital to the delivery of important health services to patients."

Services provided by pharmacists include the delivery of medications by vaccine, such as immunization against influenza. Currently, the Provincial Government funds free flu shots for residents who receive them in a physician office or regional health authority clinic, but does not provide funding should a resident choose to receive a flu shot at a pharmacy. In every other province in Canada where pharmacists can give flu shots, they are funded under the public healthcare program. Residents responded to this inequity in the survey, with 93% supporting a change in government policy to remove the barrier of patients having to pay when receiving flu shots in pharmacies.

"The provincial immunization program must be changed so that patients can decide freely where to receive their flu shots," said Glenda Power, Executive Director of PANL. "With the second lowest flu immunization rate in the country and high rates of chronic disease, this province simply cannot afford to keep barriers in place that may prevent higher rates of flu immunization. The Liberal Government has said they want improved health outcomes for residents – this change in immunization policy will support that goal."

Respondents to the survey also expressed concern with the growing opioid addiction crisis, with 80% saying the problem in Newfoundland and Labrador is extremely serious or very serious. In response to questions about the Provincial Government's Opioid Action Plan and the availability of naloxone kits, which can counter the effects of a fentanyl drug overdose and save lives, there is broad support for government to cover the cost of naloxone kits available from pharmacists through the provincial health insurance plan (68%) or for residents with low incomes (69%).

Other key findings:

- Most Newfoundlanders and Labradorians trust pharmacists to provide advice on medications (98%), management of common ailments (96%), healthy lifestyle changes (94%), and vaccinations (93%).
- Newfoundlanders and Labradorians recognize the advantages of pharmacists' expanded scope of practice. More than 4 in 5, 85%, say allowing pharmacists to do more for patients will improve health outcomes, while 88% say it will reduce health care costs.
- Most residents are open to visiting their pharmacy for health care services beyond filling a prescription – 91% are likely to visit a pharmacist for advice on medicines they are taking and 82% for management of common ailments like the flu or cold.

Pharmacists are increasingly a trusted source of health care information and services. While their role has expanded greatly over recent years, pharmacists can do even more in the province's health care system. Residents know that when pharmacists have the authority to provide health services it leads to better care, better health and better value for our health care dollar.

The **Abacus Data survey** on perceptions and attitudes about pharmacists and pharmacy services was conducted online with a representative sample of 4173 adult Canadians, including 500 residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. The survey was completed February 10 to February 16, 2017.

PANL is the voice of pharmacists, with membership including over 700 pharmacists, 160 pharmacy students and 150 pharmacies. PANL advocates for pharmacists as health care team members integral to the effective and efficient delivery of health services in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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