

Health care in NL needs to see a pharmacist



With 780 licensed pharmacists and 213 pharmacies throughout the province, pharmacists in Newfoundland and Labrador are ideally located to provide front-line healthcare services, including assessment and treatment of many minor ailments. Allowing pharmacists to manage even more conditions would further improve the healthcare system — including **reducing physician appointment wait times** and **keeping non-urgent complaints from overcrowding our emergency rooms**.



Pharmacists are ready to take on this critical role in healthcare, and ask all political parties to commit to:

- Allowing pharmacists to administer life-saving flu vaccinations to all residents of the province without having to charge a fee, thereby increasing access for patients and increasing NL's vaccination rates.
- Allowing pharmacists to bill MCP for assessing minor ailments, including smoking cessation therapies, thereby increasing access for patients and decreasing demand on emergency rooms and physicians' offices.
- Correcting the inequity that exists between pharmacist-delivered healthcare services and those provided by another healthcare provider.
- Increasing the involvement of pharmacists in primary healthcare teams, thereby better managing high levels of chronic disease in this province.
- Supporting a fair compensation structure for public service pharmacists.
- Supporting the research and evaluation of pharmacist-delivered services to gauge the benefits and cost effectiveness of pharmacist-delivered services.
- Helping mitigate the financial pressures facing NL pharmacies.
- Ensuring meaningful engagement with pharmacists in discussions around mental health and addictions services.
- Consulting with pharmacists regarding discussions with the Federal Government and other jurisdictions on national pharmacy related issues.

Pharmacists see their patients approximately 14 times a year – that's five to seven times more often than patients see their family doctors. Further, 88% of NL residents say allowing pharmacists to do more for patients will reduce costs in the healthcare system, and 82% of NL residents say that allowing pharmacists to do more for patients will improve health outcomes.

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PANL is eager to hear your party's position on the following issues of importance to the effective delivery of healthcare services in Newfoundland and Labrador.

INFLUENZA VACCINATION PROGRAM — UNIVERSAL FUNDING

Seasonal influenza is the leading cause of death from infectious disease in Canada. As of mid-March 2019, there were over 500 lab-confirmed cases and 11 flu-related deaths reported in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In most other provinces, eight of ten now, pharmacists have the ability to vaccinate for flu as part of the universal program. However, in Newfoundland and Labrador people pay \$20 to \$25 to get a flu shot from a pharmacist, unless they are covered by the province's public drug program or have private insurance coverage for flu shots. This severely limits access to this important vaccination and as a result, NL's vaccination rates are among the lowest in the country.

Question: In order to increase immunization rates, improve access for all patients, ease demand on physician offices and decrease hospitalizations resulting from influenza, will your party commit to a universal seasonal flu vaccine program so that residents of Newfoundland and Labrador can access the flu vaccine free of charge through physician offices, public health clinics and pharmacies?

PRESCRIBING FOR MINOR AILMENTS — UNIVERSAL FUNDING

Pharmacists are able to assess and prescribe for minor ailments – such as cold sores and yeast infections – which benefits patients through increased access to timely care. This also allows other health care professionals to focus on more complex conditions, thereby easing the demand on emergency rooms and physician offices. Currently, if a patient is assessed in a physician office or emergency room for a minor ailment, the service is covered under MCP. Yet, a patient assessed by a pharmacist for a minor ailment, including smoking cessation, must pay a fee as there is no government funding in place for the service. The correction of this inequity will help ensure the full intended benefit of pharmacists prescribing for minor ailments — increased access for patients and less demand on emergency rooms and physician offices, meaning resources can focus on patients with more serious conditions.

Question: Will your party commit to funding these services universally for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, regardless of whether the assessment occurs in a pharmacy, doctor's office or emergency room?

REIMBURSEMENT FOR PHARMACIST-PHYSICIAN CONSULTATIONS

Statements made by the Honourable John Haggie, Minister of Health and Community Services, such as, *"Pharmacists are highly trained, capable professionals who provide frontline services every day to the general public,"* (March 12 2018) and, *"Pharmacists are valued professionals who not only play an integral role in our healthcare system, but also serve as an important source of knowledge when it comes to healing and education,"* (January 8, 2019), demonstrate that the current Provincial Government values the role of pharmacists in delivering front-line services and their importance to sustainable and effective health care for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. However, pharmacists continue to provide services for which other providers are reimbursed. For example, the *Family Practice Renewal Program* compensates physicians for the time they spend consulting with pharmacists and other health care providers. There is a serious inequity here as pharmacists spend a significant amount of their time on a daily basis consulting with physicians on patients' prescribed medications — there is no compensation to pharmacists, and it takes valuable time out of their work day.

Question: Does your party support equity among healthcare providers? Will your party recognize the importance of pharmacists to the health care system by adequately compensating them for health care services similar to other providers, such as compensation for consultation with physicians?

Will your party commit to providing funding for the areas listed above?	Yes or No
Prescribing for minor ailments, including smoking cessation	
Expansion of the influenza vaccination program	
Compensating pharmacists for services in line with other health care providers	

PHARMACISTS IN PRIMARY CARE TEAMS

As noted in the Provincial Government's 2017-18 Chronic Disease Action Plan, Newfoundland and Labrador has some of the highest rates of chronic disease in Canada and as the population continues to age, the prevalence of chronic disease is expected to grow. Further, 63% of residents have at least one chronic disease and NL has the highest rates of diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity across the country.

The management of chronic disease is increasingly creating pressure within our healthcare system. Managing chronic disease and mitigating its impact on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians requires collaboration and commitment.

Pharmacists have direct, front-line interactions with patients managing chronic disease. This has many benefits including decreased hospitalization, medication adherence and cost reductions within the system.

Question: Will your party commit to provide funding to support the placement of pharmacists in primary healthcare teams in order to enhance accessible care for the patients of our province?

PUBLIC SERVICE PHARMACISTS

Currently, salaries for pharmacists in the provincial public service in this province are not on par with the other Atlantic provinces. Government compensates for this by providing these pharmacists with additional remuneration through a market adjustment. However, these additional monies are not a permanent addition to their salaries, are not subject to general economic increases following contract negotiations and do not figure into pension calculations, thereby penalizing pharmacists within the public service.

Questions: Will your party support a compensation structure for public service pharmacists that is on par with the other three Atlantic provinces, as opposed to the measure of market adjustment? Will your party work with public service pharmacists and their representatives to address this issue?

EVALUATION OF PHARMACIST-DELIVERED SERVICES

Sustainability of the healthcare system is a huge concern across the country and particularly in our province with high rates of chronic disease, high per capita expenditures on healthcare and decreased revenues.

Evidence-based decision making is always part of good governance and good management of provincial fiscal resources to determine if the delivery of these new services provide value for money in terms of improved health outcomes at a reasonable and sustainable cost.

With pharmacists now providing more services to patients, PANL recommends government funding specifically dedicated to the research into and evaluation of pharmacist-delivered services.

Question: Will your party fund research and evaluation activities that will determine whether pharmacist delivered services improve health outcomes at a reasonable cost?

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

Services and supports for those impacted by mental health and addictions issues are critical and must involve the collaboration of multiple stakeholders. The impacts of lack of access to timely programs are many and can be felt throughout our communities. Even a passing glance at local news coverage of break-ins and court proceedings reveal an increased prevalence of violent crime often linked to addictions issues. The security of pharmacies and their staff is a growing concern, especially given the attraction of pharmacies to thieves and those challenged with addictions.

Question: Will your party ensure involvement of PANL in discussions and approaches to address any mental health and addictions services and programming gaps? With the introduction of hub and spoke models throughout the province, will your party commit to ensuring that clinical services in these sites are delivered by on-site pharmacists?

NATIONAL POLICY IMPACTS

With the Pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance imposing drastic changes across the country, coupled with potential significant impacts of national pharmacare, the NL pharmacy industry will continue to feel the effects of federal decision making.

Question: Will your party commit to consult with PANL in advance of and throughout discussions with the Federal Government and other jurisdictions on national pharmacy-related issues that will have an impact provincially?

RECOGNITION OF FINANCIAL PRESSURES FACING COMMUNITY PHARMACIES

Over the past few years, pharmacy owners have been dealt a number of significant financial blows. In addition to increased regulation and operating costs, the April 2018 generic price reduction meant as much as a 20 percent decrease in revenue for many pharmacy owners, resulting in layoffs and reduction in pharmacy hours, thereby significantly impacting optimal patient access and care.

Further, with insurers implementing pay for performance programs and the introduction of e-prescribing, a service for which pharmacies will solely bear the cost, the financial pressures are only mounting.

These industry specific challenges are also compounded by the many inflationary pressures facing all other provincial businesses such as increase in minimum wage, rising power costs and adherence to Occupational Health and Safety standards.

Pharmacies, especially independent ones in rural communities, can be integral to the improved health and safety of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Yet, the province is at risk of losing these vital partners without substantial change.

Question: Will your party work with PANL and other stakeholders to ensure the compensation provided to pharmacies adequately reflects the true costs of delivering pharmacy services to patients?

PRIORITIZATION

How does your party prioritize the issues outlined above with '1' being least-important to '10' being most important?

Your party's ranking	
Universal funding for flu vaccination program	
Universal funding for pharmacist prescribing, i.e. minor ailments such as cold sores, yeast infections, smoking cessation	
Reimbursement equity for pharmacist-delivered services, i.e. pharmacist consultation with physicians	
Expanded pharmacist role in primary care teams	
Public service pharmacist salaries on par with other jurisdictions	
Evaluation of pharmacist-delivered services	
Expanded pharmacist involvement in mental health and addictions	
Expanded consultation on national issues	
Recognition of and assistance with financial pressures facing the operation of community pharmacies	

We look forward to your response and sharing your vision with our members and the public we serve. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or require any clarification.



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