



Hon. Carla Qualtrough  
Minister of Employment  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6  
Sent via email: [carla.qualtrough@parl.gc.ca](mailto:carla.qualtrough@parl.gc.ca)

June 3, 2022

Dear Minister Qualtrough,

We are writing on behalf of the Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns (CAPSI) and the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) in support of the federal government's commitment in Budget 2022 to expand the current list of eligible professionals under the Student Loan Forgiveness Program for those who choose to work in rural and remote areas. We were encouraged that pharmacists were included in the liberal election platform and we would like to urge the government to incorporate both licensed pharmacists and pharmacists in an approved residency program as part of this expansion.

Pharmacists are known as the most accessible health-care providers in Canada, working in community pharmacies, hospitals and primary care settings throughout the country. The pandemic has reaffirmed the importance of the profession in increasing access to health services for Canadians. Unfortunately, disproportionate access to primary health-care services in rural and remote communities continues to disadvantage over 6 million Canadian residents, including Indigenous peoples (1). Inadequate health services coupled with geographic isolation can lead to significant adverse effects on the health of the community. While a large part of the problem stems from a shortage of health providers, the retention of staff is equally critical and remains a challenge (2,3). Although the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness Program aims to address these gaps in care, its benefits are currently limited to physicians and nurses and does not recognize the growing body of evidence that supports interprofessional care (4,5,6,7).

### **Pharmacists' Impact on Primary Health Care**

Over the past decade, the scope of practice for pharmacists has increased significantly to include prescribing authority, point-of-care testing, ordering and interpreting lab tests, administering injections, renewing and adapting prescriptions and much more depending on the province. Pharmacists also play a role in disease prevention and screening. An Abacus survey from 2016 reveals that two-thirds of Canadians list pharmacists in their top three most important sources of information with regards to medications and health in general. When it comes to seeking advice on therapy, managing common ailments or chronic health conditions, a strong majority of Canadians expressed comparable levels of trust for pharmacists as with physicians and nurses (8).

In many rural and remote communities, pharmacies are often the only accessible points of care, and our patients rely on our expertise and services to keep their communities healthy. Unfortunately, recruiting and retaining pharmacy professionals to practice in these areas is often a challenge. The challenges are exacerbated by an inconsistent inter-provincial scope of practice, meaning that newer graduates who have been educated and trained to practice to the fullest scope, like in Alberta, may have difficulty choosing a place to practice that is more northern and remote. For example, most territories are far



Canadian Pharmacists Association  
Association des pharmaciens du Canada

behind many provinces in permitting pharmacists to practice to their fullest scope, which creates additional barriers for pharmacists considering rural practice. Including pharmacists as part of the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program would further incentivize pharmacists to seek out a practice in these underserved areas and benefit the populations living there.

## Moving Forward

Pharmacy institutions across Canada include education and opportunities for rural experiential placements in their curriculum to give students a profound appreciation for health-care concerns present in remote communities. One of the primary challenges for recent graduates and interns lies in the lack of financial incentives that are designed for pharmacists who decide to relocate to remote or rural areas and remain there long enough to establish their careers. Opening up the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program to licensed pharmacists and those completing a pharmacy residency would be an excellent incentive for the recruitment of pharmacists to these communities.

Other countries like the United States have successfully implemented loan forgiveness programs for pharmacists in hopes of recruiting them to underserved regions. For example, the US National Health Services Corps (NHSC) has included a state loan repayment program to support working pharmacists in rural communities (9). Alberta has adopted the Northern Alberta Development Council bursary program to achieve similar goals as the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program, but nothing has been done federally to include pharmacists (10). **On behalf of pharmacy students, interns and pharmacists in Canada, we jointly call on the government to expand the list of eligible professionals under the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program to include licensed pharmacists and pharmacists in approved residency programs.**

We look forward to future correspondence about our statement of intent and encourage you to contact [vppa@capsi.ca](mailto:vppa@capsi.ca) for any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

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cc: Minister Jean-Yves Duclos  
Minister Chrystia Freeland

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