



March 12, 2024

The Hon. Randy Boissonnault
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

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Dear Minister Boissonnault

On behalf of the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) and the Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns (CAPSI), we are writing to you today to express our disappointment that the expansion of the Canada Student Loan forgiveness program, announced in February, did not include an extension of this critical benefit to pharmacists.

While we absolutely support the provision of incentives for both doctors and nurses to practise in rural and remote communities in Canada, pharmacists play an equally critical role in the health and well-being of people in those communities, and yet these incentives are not available to pharmacy graduates.

Rural and remote areas across Canada face significant challenges in accessing consistent and comprehensive health-care services. The lack of health-care professionals in these regions is growing and pharmacists, who are increasingly being relied upon in primary care settings, play a pivotal role in bridging this gap, providing a broad range of services to their communities. Unfortunately, attracting health-care professionals to rural and remote communities has become increasingly difficult in recent years, with higher cost of living, and competition with urban lifestyle making it difficult to attract new graduates.

Those challenges, coupled with the fact that tuition fees for pharmacy programs in Canada are on par with, or in some cases exceed, those of medical schools, means that pharmacies in these areas are receiving few or no applicants to job postings, despite efforts to raise wages and vacation allowances in order to attract and retain staff. There are also reports of declining enrollment at a number of pharmacy schools across the country, which will result in even fewer graduates able to fill these critical positions; and a recent workforce planning study conducted by CPhA in New Brunswick revealed a concerning expected shortage of pharmacy professionals over the next 10 years – data that we anticipate will be similar in other provinces and will further exacerbate these issues.

Extending the Canada Student Loan forgiveness program to include pharmacists would encourage new pharmacy graduates to practise in areas that are in dire need of their expertise and services. The impact of such a policy would be significant and far-reaching. It would address the health-care disparity in underserved areas and enhance the contributions of the pharmacy profession to public health in Canada.

I urge you and your colleagues in Parliament to consider this proposal and extend loan forgiveness to pharmacists in the upcoming 2024 Budget. This would fulfil a Liberal government promise from its 2021 platform and a previously made budget commitment that has not yet resulted in any actual change.

We would be happy to meet with you to discuss this issue further and look forward to a positive response.

Sincerely

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Chief Executive Officer
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Vice President, Professional Affairs
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