



**FREDERICTON
CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE**
— The Voice of Business —

364 York Street, Suite 200
Fredericton, NB
E3B 3P7



22 April 2020

Premier Blaine Higgs
Chancery Place, P. O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB E3B 5H1
Via email: blaine.higgs@gnb.ca

Dear Premier Higgs

Re: New Brunswick Pharmacists' Co-Pay / 30-Day Prescription Restrictions

Thank you for the long hours and hard work put in by you, your team and all of government during these extraordinary and trying times. The Team NB approach has brought out the best in government – congratulations on acting quickly and decisively when the province needed it most. We have also appreciated the open ear to business concerns through the crisis.

In that vein, I am writing today regarding recent statements that you have made at your daily COVID-19 news conference, publicly asking pharmacists to waive the co-pay fees associated with the New Brunswick College of Pharmacists directive that prescription refills only be provided in 30-day increments, rather than the usual 90 days. As you know, this directive was made in view of mitigating potential drug shortages and aligns with directives in other provinces. This situation has put both patients and pharmacists in difficult positions - through no fault of their own.

The directive by the College means that many individuals are facing increased drug costs. Instead of requiring prescription renewals once every 90 days, they now need a refill three times during that same 90-day period. In fact, your government recognized the problem and issued a directive on 20 March 2020 that in effect waives the 2nd and 3rd co-pay for individuals on the New Brunswick Drug Plan - to be covered by government.

Pharmacists have a responsibility to ensure medications are safe and appropriate every time they dispense. The tasks involved to fill all prescriptions remain the same regardless of the number of days' supply. In fact, this 30-day policy in some cases has added additional administrative steps which takes more time. The professional dispensing fee is required to cover wages for the pharmacist and their support staff to perform this assessment and the associated processes and supplies that are part of each and every transaction with a customer.

Pharmacies rely on professional fees to sustain their operations. Pharmacists and their staff must be paid for the work they perform so they can continue to stay open and provide service to the citizens of New Brunswick. Your request in essence asks our pharmacists to do a significant portion of their work for free.

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Despite the fact that pharmacies remain open, they are experiencing reduced revenues especially in the front store and the costs of operating are escalating. COVID-19 has created additional costs for pharmacy related to managing safely for all New Brunswickers. This includes but is not limited to implementing controls and services to avoid the risk of spread of COVID-19, such as screening processes, physical protective measures such physical distancing amongst staff and customers, plexiglass barriers and providing delivery.

And let us not forget the other ways that pharmacists are assisting in the fight against COVID-19 as front-line healthcare workers. At the request of Public Health, pharmacists are helping to reduce non-essential physician visits by extending expired prescriptions and providing emergency prescriptions. Community pharmacists are also dealing with an unprecedented volume of interactions with members of the public because access to other healthcare providers is restricted. These interactions involve questions pertaining to COVID-19, minor ailments assessments and administration of appropriate injections. None of this is compensated by Medicare as it would be for other healthcare professionals.

On top of that, pharmacists are bearing the brunt of the public's frustration on this issue official statements from government have exacerbated the problem. Pharmacists are caring health care professionals doing their best to care for patients while at risk to themselves and their families.

Your government has made it a priority to support small business through the COVID-19 crisis. We are confident that you will agree that the solution here is not to impose these costs on the backs of pharmacists – many of whom are operating small businesses that are facing the same pressures as other operations on top of the co-pay issue.

We trust your government and the all-party COVID-19 cabinet committee is discussing a more sustainable solution that does not further burden patients or their pharmacists.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "Krista Ross".

Krista Ross, CEO, Fredericton Chamber of Commerce

cc: Hon. Ted Flemming, Minister of Health, Province of New Brunswick

cc: Hon. Mary Wilson, Minister of Economic Development and Small Business

cc: Kevin Vickers, Leader, Liberal Party of New Brunswick

cc: David Coon, Leader, Green Party of New Brunswick

cc: Kris Austin, Leader, People's Alliance of New Brunswick

cc: Janet MacDonnell, Interim Executive Director, New Brunswick Pharmacists Association

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