

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Pharmacist scope of practice expansion

June 1, 2023

Key Messages

- People in B.C. will benefit from expanded access to health care as pharmacists can now prescribe for minor ailments and contraception needs.
 - As of June 1, 2023, pharmacists can prescribe for 21 minor ailments, including muscle pain, allergies, uncomplicated urinary tract infection and pink eye, and for contraception needs.
 - This expanded scope of practice for pharmacists is a key action from B.C.'s Health Human Resources Strategy, announced on September 29, 2022, which supports patients by ensuring they get the health services they need and are cared for by a healthy workforce.
 - Pharmacists will assess the patient's presenting symptoms, review their medical history and recommend an appropriate treatment, which may include self-care advice, over-the-counter medications, or prescription medications. They may also be advised to see another health-care provider.
 - The public can access more information about this service from this webpage www.gov.bc/seeapharmacist or by calling ServiceBC at 1-833-882-0022.
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Q1. What are you announcing today?

- As of June 1, 2023, people in B.C. will be able to visit their pharmacists to be assessed and treated for 21 minor ailments, like muscle pain, allergies, uncomplicated urinary tract infection and pink eye, and for contraception needs, as the Province expands pharmacists' scope of practice.
- This is a key action from B.C.'s Health Human Resources Strategy, announced on September 29, 2022, which supports patients by ensuring they get the health services they need and are cared for by a healthy workforce.
- As of June 1, 2023, B.C. residents with a personal health number will be able to access the new Minor Ailments and Contraception service by visiting a pharmacy in-person, scheduling an appointment directly with their pharmacy by phone, or booking online when a provincial appointment management system becomes available later in the year.

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Q2. What ailments are included?

- As of June 1, 2023, the following minor ailments can be assessed by a pharmacist, and if appropriate, they can prescribe medications or other treatments:
 - Mild acne
 - Allergies (allergic rhinitis)
 - Pink eye (conjunctivitis)
 - Skin rash (dermatitis)
 - Menstrual pain
 - Indigestion (upset stomach)
 - Heartburn (acid reflux)
 - Fungal infections
 - Headaches
 - Hemorrhoids
 - Cold sores
 - Impetigo
 - Oral ulcers (canker sores)
 - Oral fungal infections (thrush)
 - Musculoskeletal pain (sore joints/muscles)
 - Nicotine dependence
 - Shingles
 - Threadworms or pinworms
 - Uncomplicated urinary tract infection
 - Itching, including from bug bites
 - Vaginal candidiasis (yeast infection)
- Patients are strongly encouraged to self assess their symptoms in advance at (www.gov.bc.ca/seeapharmacist) to make sure the service will meet their needs. Patients with severe symptoms, or characteristics that may suggest a serious underlying disease should seek immediate medical attention instead of visiting a pharmacy for treatment.
- If their symptoms match an ailment on the eligibility list, they can visit their pharmacist for an assessment.

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Q3. Are all pharmacies able to prescribe for these ailments? What if a pharmacy is not doing this?

- All licensed pharmacists who have completed a mandatory training module developed by the College of Pharmacists of BC can prescribe for these ailments.
- The majority of pharmacies or pharmacists will be ready to provide this service as of June 1st.
- Not all pharmacists in all pharmacies will be ready to offer treatment for all 21 minor ailments initially.
- Some pharmacies may need additional time to create a dedicated private, physical space for appointments to take place.
- Based on experience from similar services launched in other Canadian provinces, BC expects the pharmacy participation rate to be high.

[Confidential note: Ontario has a participation rate of 83% after three months of launch.]

Q4. How many pharmacies are participating effective June 1, 2023?

- More than 1,100 (out of 1,400 approximately 1500) community pharmacies have signaled intention to provide the service on June 01 (by signing up to the pharmacy locator list being compiled by BC Pharmacy Association).
- Over 3,000 licensed pharmacists have completed the mandatory regulatory education module and will be able to provide this service at launch.

Q5. Who is eligible to participate in this program?

- This service is free to every B.C. resident with a Personal Health Number (on your BC Services Card).

Q6. How do patients book an appointment to get a prescription? Can they get a prescription over the phone?

- Currently, people can walk into a pharmacy or book an appointment with a pharmacist by phone to receive care for their minor ailments and contraception needs; a prescription may be issued as part of the treatment plan.
- The service must be offered in person; PharmaCare will not cover virtual or phone visits.
- A provincial appointment management system will become available by June 29, 2023.

Q7. What happens if a pharmacist determines that the patient needs more care than they can provide?

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- A pharmacist will advise the patient to see another health-care provider, including a doctor or nurse practitioner, if the patient's symptoms are deemed to be non-minor, or if there are other concerns warranting further exams by a physician or nurse practitioner.
- Patients requiring medications not included in the list of drug categories will also need to be directed to see another health provider.

Q8. Are there any costs associated with this service?

- The pharmacists' assessment service is fully covered by PharmaCare as long as the patient is eligible, and the service is provided in-person.
- This service is covered for all BC residents with a Personal Health Number.
- Any associated drug costs and the dispensing fee related to a patients' prescription may be covered by the patient's PharmaCare coverage or their private insurance.

Q9. Are other provinces doing this? Will uptake of this be manageable for pharmacies/pharmacists?

- Yes, other provinces have already implemented this expanded scope of practice.

CONFIDENTIAL: all other Canadian provinces have implemented similar programs or services. Ontario is seeing a high pharmacy participation rate and a high patient uptake (we can't share numbers, but FYI participation rate is 83% and uptake is 135,000 visits over three months; note that it's NOT 135,000 prescriptions issued).

Q10. How many people are expected to benefit from this? Will uptake of this be manageable for pharmacies/pharmacists?

- Based on experience from other Canadian provinces, B.C. is expecting between 16,000 to 64,000 visits per month. The uptake is expected to gradually increase over time.
- This range is based on recent experience in Ontario and an estimate of unmet need.

Q11. What is the expansion of the pharmacists' scope of practice?

- Optimizing the scope of pharmacists is part of B.C.'s Health Human Resources Strategy.
- It means pharmacists can safely provide many drugs by injection or intranasally and adapt or review many prescriptions, relieving pressure on primary care providers and enabling people to access some types of care more quickly.
- As of Oct. 14, 2022, pharmacists can now administer more vaccines and renew prescriptions for up to a two-year period for people whose family doctors have retired or left their practices.

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- Beginning June 1st, 2023, pharmacists will be able to assess and treat people for 21 minor ailments, like muscle pain, allergies, uncomplicated urinary tract infection and pink eye, and for contraception needs.

Q12. Are there plans to further expand pharmacist scope of practice to include more ailments and medications?

- The Ministry is exploring the feasibility of further expanding the scope of practice of pharmacist to improve access to quality patient care.

Q13. How are pharmacists being compensated for this additional work?

- The Minor Ailments and Contraception Service provides funding for participating pharmacies through an assessment fee, of \$20 per assessment.

Q14. Why is the online booking system not ready for June 1, 2023?

- MACS represents a large change to how pharmacies operate, and we wanted to give them time to adjust and understand their staffing and scheduling requirements before asking them to commit to appointment slots in a provincial system.

Q15. How will the online booking work effective June 29, 2023?

- The online booking system will be similar to the Get Vaccinated system that people used to book their COVID-19 and influenza vaccination appointments.
- Citizens will be able to locate pharmacies that offer the service they need, be referred to a self-assessment guide to make sure the service is suitable for them, then proceed to book an appointment with the pharmacy of their choice.

Q16. What is the self-assessment tool and how does it work?

- The self-assessment tool helps people determine if seeing a pharmacist is right for their ailment, or if their symptoms are more serious and they should seek immediate medical attention, like going to an emergency room: www.gov.bc/seeapharmacist

Q17. How will people find out which pharmacies are participating?

- Before the launch of the booking system, people can visit www.gov.bc/seeapharmacist for participating pharmacies.

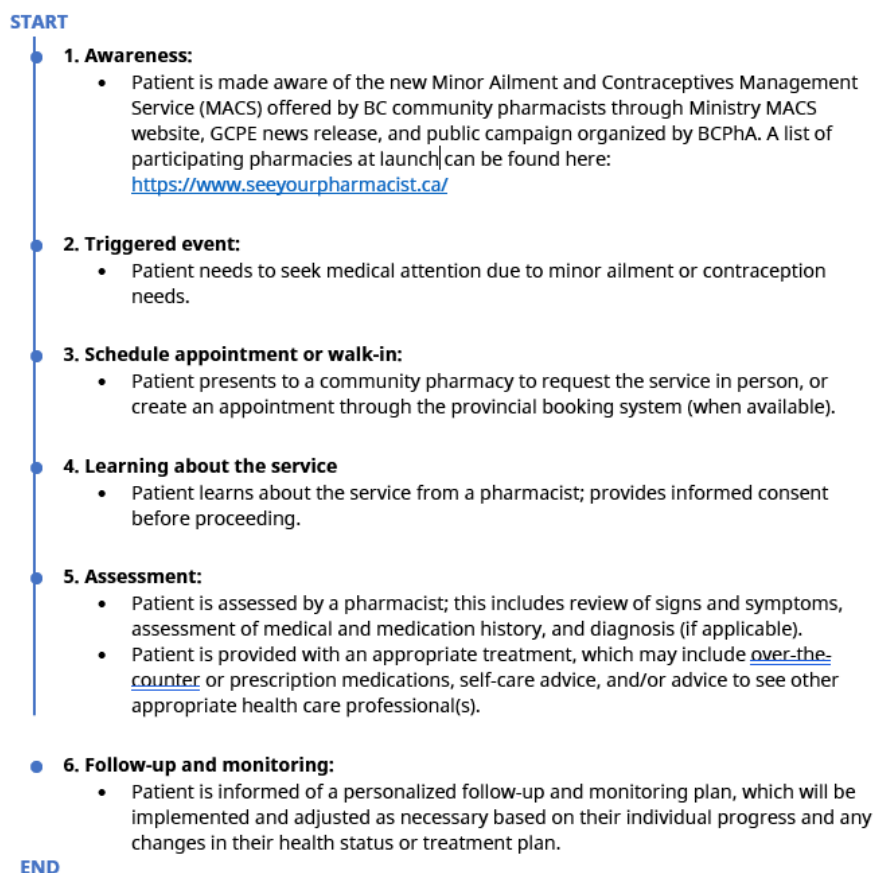
Q18. Describe how this works for a person who is accessing this new service?

- People can walk into a pharmacy or contact the pharmacy by phone to initiate the service.

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- A pharmacist will make sure the person is eligible, obtain informed consent, perform the assessment then offer a treatment option (which can be advice for self-care, over-the-counter product(s), prescription for medications or directions to seek help from another healthcare provider).
- Please refer to the below for more:

Appendix D: Patients' experience of MACS (expected patient journey)



Q19. What else is the Province doing to increase and improve access to primary care in B.C.?

- This scope expansion is part of B.C.'s Health Human Resources Strategy. This strategy, announced on Sept. 29, 2022, ensures people get the health services they need and are cared for by a healthy workforce. The strategy focuses on 70 actions to recruit, train and retain health-care workers while redesigning the health-care system to foster workplace satisfaction and innovation.
- As part of this strategy, the Province is:

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- Implementing a new family physician payment model to help more family physicians start or continue their practice and ensure people throughout the province have access to primary care.
- Continuing to offer a New-to-Practice Incentives program to encourage new Canadian and international medical graduates to practice family medicine by providing additional payment for overhead, and offering a signing bonus and medical education debt reduction grant;
- Increasing access to alternative physician payment contracts through our Primary Care Strategy and funding to Health Authorities to offer these contracts; and
- Expanding the supply of physicians, nurses and allied health care providers through additional post-secondary training seats,
- Building a second medical school in Surrey,
- Making it easier for internationally educated nurses to work in B.C. with new financial supports and more efficient assessment pathway,
- Creating more pathways for international medical graduates to work in priority Primary Care Networks and rural communities after gaining licensure.
- Working on a digital rostering system for family physicians that will determine where capacity exist throughout the province to attach patients to clinics and providers.
- Implementing a new first-in-Canada nurse-to-patient staffing model, which will allow nurses to spend more time with the people they care for and provide better, more person-focused services.
- Further supporting nurses in accessing training and career development opportunities, as well as their well-being and day-to-day operations.
- Offering incentives for health-care workers to live and work in rural or remote areas
- Establishing two more cancer centres in Nanaimo and in Kamloops, so that people who need cancer treatment don't have to travel as far to receive critically important care.
- Improving access and health equity for rural, remote, and First Nations communities, including through the Travel Assistance Program, which helps cover the costs for eligible patients, to reduce the financial burden of travel.
- Supporting maternity and pregnancy care to help expecting parents undergo pregnancy and give birth closer to home, near their loved ones.
- Establishing the Northern Health Virtual Primary and Community Care Clinic, which provides patients in the region with virtual access to primary and community health-care services

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- The Province also continues to expand team-based health care throughout the province by opening 32 urgent and primary care centres, opening community health centres, establishing more than 60 primary care networks and announcing three First Nations primary care centres, with more to come.
 - As of January 2023, 63 Primary Care Networks (PCNs) have been launched by the Ministry of Health, covering 73% of Community Health Service Areas (CHSAs) and 85% of the provincial population.
 - The Ministry plans to have approximately 99 PCNs covering the entire geography of the province by 2025.
 - To date, we have announced 32 Urgent and Primary Care Centres (UPCCs) around the province (7 in the Fraser, 8 in the Interior, 2 in the North, 6 in Vancouver Coastal and 8 in Vancouver Island).
 - Across the province, there have been almost 1.7 million patient visits across all UPCCs.
 - To date, more than 1,300 healthcare providers have been recruited to support family practices, urgent and primary care centers, community health centres, nurse practitioner clinics, First Nations led primary care clinics, all working together in more than 60 local primary care networks across the province.
 - The British Columbia Ministry of Health established the New to Practice (NTP) Incentives Program for new to practice physicians who have recently completed their family medicine residency program and wish to provide full-service, longitudinal primary care. As of May 6, 2023, 144 new contracts have been signed (along with seven additional expressions of interest).
 - Of these 144 net-new physicians, 45 are Canadian Medical Graduates (10 in Fraser, nine in Interior, 16 in Vancouver Coastal, and 10 on the Island), and 99 are International Medical Graduates (41 in Fraser, e11 in Interior, 25 in Vancouver Coastal, and 22 on the Island).