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May 5, 2020

Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
College Park 5th Floor, 777 Bay St, Toronto, ON M7A 2J3
Sent by email

Dear Minister Elliott,

We are writing to you on behalf of more than 81,000 members of RTOERO, a non-profit organization benefiting education retirees.

Over the past weeks, our members have been contacting us with concerns about Ontario's approach to managing the prescription medication supply. As medications are now generally being limited to a 30-day supply, rather than the more usual supply of 90 or 100 days, it has created hardships for our members – and for many seniors and other at-risk populations. This limitation is sending vulnerable seniors out in public more frequently to pick up their prescriptions. It is also adding a financial burden, because they must pay the dispensing fee each time the prescription is filled.

We ask that the government immediately take the following actions:

1. Provide instruction to pharmacies to limit the dispensing fee to the same amount that would have been charged for filling the prescription as written. The fee could be paid on the first partial refill or could be divided equally among the partial refills.
2. Revise the advice to pharmacists and allow them to return to filling the complete prescription for seniors as soon as possible.

In making these requests to the government, we are aware of the following:

- Some pharmacies do provide home delivery, but this is not a consistent service. Issues of mobility and access to transportation are significant barriers for many seniors and may prevent them from accessing their prescriptions in a timely way.
- There are costs incurred by pharmacies with every prescription dispensed, particularly the costs associated with processes that ensure the accuracy and safety of medications dispensed. Simply transferring the financial burden from seniors onto pharmacists is not an equitable approach, and we are looking to the government for a better solution.





The approaches of other provinces may be instructive on this issue:

- Some provinces have lifted prescription limits or are in the process of doing so. For example, New Brunswick eliminated the 30-day limit on prescription refills as of April 23. Newfoundland and Labrador announced on May 4 that it will phase out the 30-day limit within two weeks.
- Some provinces are paying part or all of the additional dispensing fees for patients whose prescriptions are for longer than 30 days, Provinces taking this approach include Alberta and Nova Scotia.
- Provinces such as Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland have been working directly with pharmacist associations to ensure that dispensing fees do not exceed what would normally be charged.

We are confident that the Ontario government is closely monitoring the strategies that other provinces are employing. As the province with the largest population, we trust that Ontario will act quickly to take a leadership role on this issue.

We believe it is unfair to expect seniors and other vulnerable individuals to bear the burden of ensuring the security of the Ontario drug supply. They should not have to worry about whether they can get needed medication or whether they can afford their prescription due to increased dispensing costs. Seniors should not be leaving their homes unnecessarily to fill 30-day prescription and thereby put their health at risk. We ask you to honour this government's commitment to make life more affordable for Ontarians and to build healthier and safer communities.

We value our relationship with the Ontario government and have been pleased to meet with many government MPPs during our past three annual lobbying days at Queen's Park. We are proud to offer counsel and support to the government as a member of the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility Liaison Committee. Our board of directors, volunteer leaders, 81,000+ members and senior staff stand ready to assist the government in the important work of protecting seniors' health during this pandemic crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Martha Foster'.

Martha Foster, Chair of Board of Directors

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Jim Grieve'.

Jim Grieve, Chief Executive Officer

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Laurel Brazill, Director, Stakeholder Relations, Minister's Office, Ministry of Health

Harpreet Bassi, Director of Policy, Minister's Office, Ministry of Health

Alex Puddifant, Executive Assistant, Minister's Office, Ministry of Health

Patrick Dicerni, ADM & Executive Officer, Drugs and Devices Division, Ministry of Health

David Schachow, Director, Drug Programs Delivery Branch, Ministry of Health

Jacqueline Cureton, Assistant Deputy Minister, Seniors and Accessibility Policy Programs & Strategic Partnerships

Kathleen Henschel, Director, Seniors and Accessibility Policy Programs & Strategic Partnerships

Jen Baker, Chair, Ontario Pharmacists Association