



Dear Members,

I am writing to you today to tell you we hear you! We know you are frustrated by the recent announcements by government that impact your practice, your patients, and the profession of pharmacy in Alberta, and we need your support.

If you haven't already heard, late last Friday, June 13, 2025, the Alberta Government announced changes to the distribution of COVID-19 vaccine by removing access to pharmacies. This decision comes as a complete surprise and a deep disappointment. As a trusted stakeholder and regular contributor to government discussions on public health strategy, the Alberta Pharmacists' Association has always had a seat at the table. We are typically consulted on matters that directly impact pharmacy practice and patient care — yet in this case, there was no prior notice, no dialogue, and no opportunity for input. This abrupt move disregards the expertise of pharmacists and rather appears to be more focused on cost savings vs. protecting Albertans.

## **What was announced:**

Without prior consultation with RxA, the government has announced that community pharmacies will no longer be part of [Alberta's COVID-19 vaccination program](#) this fall. Instead, vaccine distribution will be limited exclusively to Alberta Health Services (AHS) public health clinics, with only AHS providers authorized to administer the vaccine. This decision comes alongside a significant reduction in vaccine supply. The province plans to order just 485,000 doses, 30% fewer than the 700,000 doses administered last year. Of those, approximately 600,000 were delivered through pharmacies, highlighting the critical role pharmacists have played in vaccine access and uptake.

The new rollout will also follow a phased approach (Phases 1–4), with each phase opening only if sufficient vaccine supply remains. Compounding access issues, vulnerable Albertans who wish to be vaccinated will now face out-of-pocket costs ranging from \$80 to \$110 per dose if sufficient supply exists. The importance of vaccinating and protecting pharmacists and other healthcare providers has not even been mentioned nor accounted for.

## **Their rationale:**

The government has cited vaccine wastage as the reason pharmacists will no longer have access to COVID-19 vaccines, but let's clarify the facts. Over the past four years, while the Federal government covered the cost of COVID-19 vaccines, the Provincial government raised no concerns about wastage. In fact, Alberta Health's directive to providers was clear: vaccinate as many people as possible, even if it meant some doses from multi-dose vials might go unused.

COVID-19 vaccines have consistently been supplied in multi-dose vials. Providers, including pharmacists, were expected to administer the vaccine to any individual requesting it, regardless of how many doses remained in the vial. At the time, any unused doses were considered acceptable wastage under government policy. Now that the Provincial government is responsible for funding the vaccine, wastage has suddenly become a central concern.



This year, we know that manufacturers are planning to produce single dose packaging, including pre-filled syringes, which will essentially eliminate wastage in the program. This shift underscores the value of RxA's continued advocacy on behalf of pharmacists, who have been calling for single-dose COVID-19 vaccines, similar to the format used for influenza vaccines in pharmacies, for the past two years.

## **Access to Care Reduced:**

Unfortunately, Albertans will face increased barriers to accessing COVID-19 vaccines this year. Not only will vaccines no longer be available through local community pharmacies, but the overall supply has also been significantly reduced. In the past two years (2023/24 and 2024/25), approximately 750,000 doses were administered annually under the government's program. This year, however, only 485,000 doses have been allocated, leaving a quarter million Albertans who chose to be vaccinated without access to supply.

This reduction is difficult to justify, especially given that Alberta Health already has two years of data indicating that demand consistently required 700,000 doses. Instead of aligning supply with demonstrated need, the province is introducing a pre-booking process intended to gauge interest, an approach that adds unnecessary complexity and cost without guaranteeing access to a vaccine.

Even more concerning is the decision to limit free vaccination to individuals in Phases 1 and 2. Seniors (Phase 3) and the general public (Phase 4) will only be eligible to receive leftover doses—and only if they are willing to pay out-of-pocket costs ranging from \$80 to \$110 per dose. These individuals will not be able to use private insurance to offset the cost. This policy shift is particularly troubling in light of recent changes that increased drug copayments for seniors, as [communicated by Benefact](#) earlier in June.

Beyond cost, other barriers will further reduce vaccine uptake. Those without internet access, a fixed address, or reliable transportation will find it especially difficult to navigate the new system. Without the trusted support of their local pharmacist, who has played a key role in encouraging vaccination, many Albertans who would otherwise get vaccinated may now go without.

## **Costs to the Health System:**

If cost is a driving factor, community pharmacists are already the most cost effective, efficient vaccine provider in the province. The decision to centralize vaccine delivery using public health clinics will mean fewer locations and limited access hours for Albertans to try to access the vaccine. Community pharmacies operate in 278 communities across Alberta, often serving as the only accessible healthcare provider in those areas. Will Alberta Health Services establish 278 public health clinics to match this reach? What additional strain and cost will this place on our already overburdened healthcare system?

This province has 5500 pharmacists practicing in 1700 pharmacies that are authorized, willing and capable of vaccinating the public in a short period of time. In fact, when properly supported, pharmacists administered over 1 million influenza shots in just over four weeks in 2020.



Pharmacists are not only accessible, but they are also proven, scalable, and already the lowest-cost vaccination providers in Alberta.

The consequences of reduced vaccine access extend far beyond inconvenience. Last year, 700,000 Albertans were vaccinated against COVID-19. Still, 3,000 people were hospitalized, 190 required intensive care, and 368 Albertans lost their lives to this preventable disease. As vaccination rates decline, we can expect hospitalizations, ICU admissions, and deaths to rise, placing even greater pressure on the healthcare system. The true cost of these decisions will be measured in lives and health outcomes.

## **In closing:**

What the government has failed to say, I will. Thank you Alberta pharmacists!

Thank you to every pharmacist who has championed COVID-19 vaccination—booking appointments, maximizing doses, promoting boosters, and providing public reassurance—you've done heroic work. You have saved lives. You've protected this province.

RxA will not remain silent while a vital and functioning system is torn down without justification. But to fight this, we need more than outrage, we need strength in numbers. We need your support. We need your membership. And we need your voice.

Now is the time to stand behind RxA. Share your stories. Speak to your patients. Talk to your MLA. Be visible in your communities and your media. We have already begun to create media attention and to publicly share our concerns. Let's show this government that Alberta's pharmacists will not be sidelined—and that we will not allow patient care to be sacrificed for bad politics and bad math.

I am proud to be a pharmacist in Alberta. And I am proud to stand with more than 6,000 of you who continue to lead, adapt, and deliver high quality care—no matter how hard the system tries to ignore you.

Please help share our story—through your social media, your conversations with patients, and your engagement with the public and media.

Thank you,

Brittany Zelmer

President, Alberta Pharmacists' Association