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94% Say Pharmacists Are Vital Part of Health Care System

TORONTO, Nov. 24 /CNW/ - As the Ontario government considers difficult decisions on funding for health care services, a new Nanos Research poll suggests that Ontarians would strongly oppose cutting any funding to community pharmacies. Seventy-six per cent of respondents said they would oppose or somewhat oppose reducing compensation for pharmacies. In addition, nearly 19 in 20 agreed (83%) or somewhat agreed (11%) that pharmacists are a vital part of the health care system.

"There's a much higher degree of consensus on these issues than you see with most public policy questions," said Nik Nanos, President of Nanos Research. "People trust and depend on their pharmacies, and there would be very little support for cutting their funding."

Ontario's Community Pharmacies have warned that cutting funding would lead to pharmacist and staff layoffs, significant service reductions, shorter pharmacy operating hours, less access to pharmacists, and the closing of some neighbourhood pharmacies. According to the poll, Ontarians have clear opinions on these issues.

- 9 in 10 believe it is very important (63%) or somewhat important (27%) to have access to their community pharmacy after their physician's office is closed.
- Three-quarters agreed (63%) or somewhat agreed (12%) that if their community pharmacy closed, it would hurt both the quality and the access to health care in their neighbourhood.

"It's very encouraging that the public supports community pharmacy so strongly, and we hope the government is listening," said Ben Shenouda, President of the Independent Pharmacists of Ontario. "We are very concerned about public comments from government officials indicating that they intend to reduce generic drug prices, which under the current system would cut funding to pharmacies. Unless the government adequately made up the difference through direct funding for pharmacy services, this would have very serious consequences for patient care and the ability of pharmacies to continue delivering services."

Chronic underfunding

Ontario has chronically underfunded pharmacy care. The province has set a fee of \$7 to dispense a prescription for patients covered by the Ontario Drug Benefit program, and that fee has increased only 56 cents in the last 20 years. An independent study commissioned in 2008 by the Ontario Pharmacists' Association and the Canadian Association of Chain Drug Stores showed that the actual median cost to pharmacies to provide services for one prescription is \$13.77, almost twice the amount actually set by the province. Ontario provides no direct funding at all for almost all additional health care services pharmacies provide.

The government has indicated that drug system changes could also include reducing or eliminating the indirect funding pharmacies receive in the form of professional allowances paid by drug manufacturers. Under the current system, without professional allowances, pharmacies lose money when they provide care to patients covered by the Ontario Drug Benefit program.

"Pharmacists provide essential healthcare services every day, and it's clear that patients value that care," said Dennis Darby, CEO of the Ontario Pharmacists' Association.

"Pharmacists are medication experts. They are also one of the most readily accessible healthcare professionals. We need to ensure that pharmacists are appropriately compensated for the care they provide, and that the community pharmacies in which they practice are financially stable. We will continue to work with the Ontario government toward this goal."

Survey methodology

The poll was conducted by Nanos Research. Results are based on a random representative telephone survey of 1,001 adult Ontarians, between November 12 and November 15, 2009. An additional 208 interviews were conducted among retired Ontarians to allow for a more robust analysis of that portion of the sampling of opinion. For the final sample group the results of the retired respondents was weighted down to their true proportion of the population. The results are representative of the Ontario adult population within acceptable margins. The statistical results of a random sample 1,001 Ontarians are accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. For more information please visit the Nanos Research website at www.nanosresearch.com.

[About Ontario's Community Pharmacies](#)

The Ontario's Community Pharmacies coalition is the unified voice of community pharmacy in Ontario, representing independent owner-operated stores, "banner" groups of independently-owned stores that work together, as well as large and small pharmacy chains. The coalition is supported by the associations and organizations that represent both the profession and the neighbourhood business of pharmacy, including the Ontario Pharmacists' Association, the Independent Pharmacists of Ontario, the Canadian Association of Chain Drug Stores and the Ontario Chain Drug Association.

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