



March 14, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

In the context of the evolving COVID-19 outbreak and implementation of prevention and control measures across the country, it will be important to maintain Canadians' access to controlled substances when needed for medical treatments (e.g., treatment of substance use disorders and chronic pain). This is critical in order to enable individuals who are currently undergoing medical treatment, including for chronic conditions, and need to self-isolate, or adhere to social distancing guidance from public health officials.

To support access, Health Canada is preparing to issue the following exemptions for prescriptions of controlled substances under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (CDSA) and its Regulations. If permitted within the applicable provincial/territorial scopes of practice, the planned exemptions will:

- permit pharmacists to extend prescriptions;
- permit pharmacists to transfer prescriptions to other pharmacists; and
- permit prescribers to issue verbal orders (i.e., over the phone) to extend or refill a prescription.

We expect to issue these class exemptions during the week of March 16, 2020. We strongly encourage all partners to work to implement these exemptions in their jurisdictions and welcome any additional suggestions you may have to maintain Canadians' access to controlled substances for medical reasons during the pandemic.

We strongly urge Ministries and regulators to conduct a thorough assessment of any barriers to access to medicines that could contravene public health advice for social distancing and self-isolation, when appropriate. This could include, for example, temporarily lifting restrictions on take-home doses ("carries") of opioid agonist treatments, and allowing those with chronic conditions to obtain enough medication to last through a period of self-isolation.

We also recognize that local pandemic precautions may impact the operations of Supervised Consumption Sites (SCS), and are committed to work directly with SCS Operators to assess each individual situation and develop appropriate modifications to their protocols and practices. Operators are encouraged to contact the Office of Controlled Substances' Exemptions Section at hc.exemption.sc@canada.ca.

If you have any questions, or wish to discuss any other potential barriers to treatment and harm reduction services related to the COVID-19 pandemic, please contact Health Canada's Office of Controlled Substances, at: hc.ocs-bsc.sc@canada.ca.

Best Regards,

Eric Costen
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