Federal Election 2019: Why you need to get involved and tell our story

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NEXT MONTH, CANADIANS WILL BE GOING TO the polls to elect a new federal government. Federal investments in key health areas such as addressing the needs of Canada's aging population, improving drug access for Canadians from coast to coast to coast and tackling the unabating opioid crisis will likely be on the agenda for all parties—issues that are front and centre for pharmacists, whether in hospital, primary care or community pharmacies.

As the national association representing the profession, the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) regularly meets with elected and nonelected officials from all parties, as well as government officials from departments such as Health Canada, Finance and Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

We do this to raise awareness and understanding of how pharmacists contribute to the health of Canadians and how your unique expertise can bring innovative solutions to many of the current challenges in health care. However, our messages are always strengthened when they are reinforced by you—frontline pharmacists who see first-hand what issues patients face as they navigate the system.

That's why, regardless of your political stripe, getting involved in advocacy is so important for advancing the issues that matter to the profession and the sector. While it might seem intimidating at first, rest assured that candidates, and eventual members of parliament, want to hear from you. You are their constituents and members of the communities that they represent.

Whether you are new to advocacy or a seasoned advocate, there are some simple ways to make a difference in the lead-up to the next federal election and once the new government is established. You can also use these tips to get

involved at the local or provincial/territorial level with the support of your provincial associations.

1. Prepare 2 to 3 key messages that you want to convey. Your associations can help you identify key issues and offer some suggested messages. And be prepared to share some personal stories that show how decisions made by governments can affect the care that you offer to your patients. The website www.rethinkpharmacists.ca also has useful and “plain language” information to help you craft your message, as well as powerful stories to share of pharmacists providing exemplary patient care. Meet with the candidate and your elected representatives. In an election period, you can reach out to the candidates in and around your riding and share your perspective on issues that matter to you. Once a candidate is elected, reach out with congratulations and continue to engage throughout their term. A quick call or email to their office to ask for a meeting is typically all that's required. But remember that candidates and elected officials are often busy, so sometimes you have to follow up a few times.
2. Attend candidate town halls or debates and ask a question. This is an easy way to raise an issue and to get candidates to respond directly to your question or concern.
3. Send a personalized email to the candidates and to elected representatives expressing your views on your priorities.
4. Most important, continue to provide excellent care to your patients. You never know when government officials, elected or not, might walk through your doors

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and their experience at the pharmacy counter will often shape their impressions of the profession.

As the wise adage says, “Decisions are made by those who show up.” Every day, governments are making decisions that affect how care is delivered, the role of professionals and how businesses operate. They make these

decisions based on their own experiences and by hearing from experts. Pharmacists and members of the pharmacy team bring a unique perspective on key issues and are ideally placed to be the link between the health care system and patients.

This fall, we encourage you to be advocates for the profession and your patients. Share your stories and together our voice will be stronger. ■

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