

Nova Scotia Law Amendments Submission Regarding Bill 17, Fair Drug Pricing Act.

Submitted by Jason and Krista Trider, pharmacist owners

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My name is Jason Trider and this is my wife, Krista and my father, Carl (past pharmacy owner). My wife and I are second-generation owners of Windsor Pharmasave, an independent pharmacy located at 30 Gerrish Street in Windsor, Nova Scotia. We employ over 30 people from our community, many of whom have worked for the family business for over 20 years. We are the most accessible health care providers – our pharmacy is open 364 days of the year, and we even get calls at home occasionally from our customers. We are open from 9 am to 9 pm Monday to Friday, 9 am to 6 pm Saturdays and 12 pm to 6 pm Sundays and holidays. We support many local organizations and charities - almost on a daily basis - and provide funding to local initiatives such as the Hants Aquatic Center, Mermaid Theatre, the food bank and various sports teams. Our staff members speak to students in local schools and participate annually in the Windsor Pumpkin Regatta and the Relay for Life, and we're always interested in supporting such community events. We, as small business owners, care about our community and are committed to investing in it.

Krista and I learned in pharmacy school the importance of pharmaceutical care; finding and solving drug related problems thereby improving quality of life for our patients. As a pharmacy in small-town Nova Scotia, our patients and customers have come to rely on us for these and other services – we have patients without family doctors, and those who do tend to have very long wait times to see their doctor. A day spent in our busy pharmacy would enlighten you to the services we are providing – every day we are working with physicians to adjust dosages, change medications, confer on drug interactions, and make changes for drug plan coverage. We are also fielding questions from patients on over-the-counter medications, medical conditions, prescriptions, and the list goes on. Many of the questions we answer help patients to avoid visits to outpatient departments, and unnecessary visits to physicians, both of which are costly to the government. We offer services such as free prescription delivery to make it easier for our patients to get their medication. Our pharmacists give presentations to seniors in the community to promote health and proper use of medication. With the expanded scope of practice, we look forward to having an even greater positive impact on the health outcomes of our patients.

We are here today to voice our concerns about the government's recent announcement of the Fair Drug Pricing for Nova Scotians legislation (Bill 17). While we support the goal of Bill 17 to reduce the cost of generic medication, the government has announced this without considering the impact this has for pharmacies in our province.

There are three important issues on the table now for pharmacies; one is the Fair Drug Pricing legislation (Bill 17), and the others are remuneration for expanded pharmacy services and the tariff agreement slated for July 1st, 2011. By expanding the scope of practice for pharmacists, the government stands to offer greater health care for the residents of Nova Scotia and lessen the need of emergency room visits.

In order for the pharmacist to do these extra functions we must be funded for the time required to perform them. As it stands now, pharmacists are being asked to do more with far less. The tariff agreement determines what a pharmacy will be paid by MSI to dispense prescriptions. Currently we receive payment for the cost of the medication, a small mark-up to cover some of the carrying costs, and a flat-rate professional fee. While the cost of dispensing a prescription has gone up considerably over the past several years (with increases in heating bills, minimum wage, etc), the professional fee to cover these costs has not changed significantly. Pharmacy has been able to cope with this because rebates from generic drug manufacturers have filled the gap between the costs of filling a prescription (estimated at about \$15) and the fee paid by MSI (currently \$10.62).

By only looking at one piece of the puzzle, the government has left pharmacy with great financial uncertainty. If Bill 17 passes and everything else remains the same, over the 1st 18 months of this legislation our small town pharmacy would stand to lose \$187,000, or 20% from just the pharmacare portion of our business. This does not include the subsequent losses from private insurers which are likely to double this figure. I'm sure you can appreciate how concerning this is to us – there will have to be drastic changes in order for our business to survive. We will be able to offer fewer services (like free prescription delivery and in-store blood pressure/blood glucose testing clinics) and less support for local initiatives (such as support of sports teams and community groups). We will have to consider cutting down on staffing via eliminating jobs or cutting hours. Because of staffing cuts, our pharmacists will be less available to interact with patients and physicians to resolve medication problems. We may be forced to refer our patients back to emergency rooms or family doctors when there are issues with prescriptions. Our pharmacists care deeply about the community they serve and this uncertainty will be very disappointing from a professional and business perspective.

Last week I heard a radio message from the provincial NDP government, pledging support to small businesses in Nova Scotia, because that is what will help Nova Scotian families. As a small business owner I am very concerned since I have not felt that support in Bill 17. If that radio campaign was indeed sincere, I am confident that the government will make adjustments to Bill 17. We request a delay in the passing of Bill 17 until a new tariff agreement and funding for expanded services are negotiated. Giving pharmacies the details on all aspects will allow us to move forward with a business plan. The significant cutback of generic drug prices to 35% of brand over just 12 months is very quick. It does not give pharmacies enough time to adjust to a new pricing model; we would like the transition period to be extended.

In previous negotiations on the tariff agreement, PANS has worked alongside the government allowing Nova Scotians to receive some of the lowest generic drug prices in Canada as the top 20 generic drugs have been paid at a discounted rate by MSI. We, as pharmacists and pharmacy owners, through PANS, would be pleased to work with the government again to provide fair drug prices for Nova Scotians, while also ensuring fairness for pharmacies. I trust you will hear our concerns and ensure sustainability of the local pharmacy; thereby improving health outcomes for all Nova Scotians.

Thank you.