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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**Attention: Health/Lifestyle Section Editors**

**Pharmacists play a vital role in health care reform**  
**Alberta Pharmacists' Association responds to Health Policy Framework**

Edmonton, AB – In the event of a flu pandemic, would you want to ignore the critical presence of 3,000 health care professionals trained and qualified to administer flu injections at approximately 900 locations throughout the province?

The Alberta Pharmacists' Association (RxA) believes this is only one example of the crucial life-saving and cost-effective role pharmacists are well-positioned to play within the health care system.

RxA is lobbying for changes to the Health Professions Act (HPA) and Pharmacy and Drug Act (PDA) that would grant pharmacists unrestricted access to prescribe Schedule 1 drugs and administer drugs by injection, and compensate them for providing professional services such as structured medication reviews and assistance with chronic disease management.

RxA recently made a presentation to the Minister of Health and Wellness, outlining how many of the key points of the Health Policy Framework relate to Alberta pharmacists' efforts to pioneer an expanded scope of practice.

"RxA is pleased that the Alberta government is prepared to look at the potential innovation and leadership Alberta pharmacists bring to the health care table in supporting key components of the Health Policy Framework's 10-point plan," said RxA CEO Barry Cavanaugh.

According to RxA, the Health Policy Framework addresses a number of issues which complement the goals of Alberta Pharmacists, including: patient-centred care; promoting flexibility in scope of practice of health care professionals; creating long-term sustainability and flexible funding options; and deriving economic benefits from health services and research.

"Pharmacists are the true drug experts and believe they can make a difference in the health care system now and into the future. With increased prescribing authority, and compensation for providing enhanced professional services, pharmacists will not only get to do what they were fully trained to do, they'll be able to ease the burden on other health care providers," said Cavanaugh.

With the proposed changes to the HPA and PDA, a patient requiring a first-time prescription for medication for a health concern will have the option of seeing a pharmacist for an assessment and triage who will determine whether or not the patient requires a referral to a physician before being prescribed medication. Patients will also have the choice of visiting their family physician or pharmacist for drug refills.

Also, with compensation for professional services in place, patients may see increased opportunities to have one-on-one chronic disease management sessions with pharmacists for diseases such as asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure and many others.

“With the changes to the legislation expected to take place this summer, we may see over time the pharmacy profession evolve to a point where the dispensing function will be recognized as distinct from professional services, and where pharmacists will work side-by-side with nurse practitioners and in collaboration with physicians. Albertans only stand to benefit from this collaborative approach in terms of cost-savings and reduction of adverse events,” added Cavanaugh.

**A few facts from the American Pharmacists Association:**

- Over 20 studies and demonstration projects confirm that pharmacists add value to the health care system by improving care and decreasing cost.
- Pharmacists providing disease management services in their community saved an average of \$2,700 per year per patient in total medical costs.
- Drug therapy changes based on the pharmacists’ recommendations reduced unscheduled hospital visits, urgent care visits, emergency room visits and hospital days.
- As hospitals increased the number of pharmacists providing pharmaceutical care, medication errors have decreased by over 65 per cent.
- Pharmacists reviewed drug therapy and found ways to improve medication use in nearly 65 per cent of all patients.
- Pharmacist-recommended drug therapy changes saved over \$640 per year in health costs per individual (\$280,000/year per pharmacist)
- Pharmacists collaborating with physicians to care for high-risk patients reduced the number of prescriptions per patient and saved nearly \$600 per year per patient in drug costs.
- Consultant pharmacist-conducted drug regimen review increases the number of patients who experience optimal therapeutic outcomes by 43 per cent, and saves as much as \$3.6 billion annually in costs associated with medication-related problems.
- In a study evaluating the effect of pharmacists providing pharmaceutical care services on the economic outcomes of patient care, an average benefit of \$16.70 of value to the health care system was realized for each dollar invested in clinical pharmacy services.

For more information on the Evidence of the Value of the Pharmacist, go to:  
<http://www.aphanet.org/pharmcare/2002ncslinsert1.pdf>

For more information on the Alberta Pharmacists’ Association, go to: [www.albertapharmacy.ca](http://www.albertapharmacy.ca)

RxA was launched in 2000 as the professional advocacy body and voice for Alberta pharmacists. Representing more than 2,500 pharmacists throughout the province, RxA’s mission is, through leadership and advocacy, to promote and support the value of pharmacists as primary health care providers.