

National Association of Chain Drug Stores

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Opening Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Steven C. Anderson, FASAE, CAE, IOM
NACDS President & Chief Executive Officer

Sara Roszak, DrPH, MPH
NACDS Senior Vice President, Health and Wellness Strategy and Policy

Lisa Koonin, DrPH, MN, MPH
Health Preparedness Partners, LLC, Founder and Principal

ANDERSON:

Good afternoon.

Just a reminder: The National Association of Chain Drug Stores represents national and regional pharmacy chains – in the traditional drug store, grocery and mass retail settings.

The number of stores operated by NACDS members ranges from four to about 10,000 – for a total of 40,000 across the membership.

Many of you joined us for our briefings earlier this year – in January and February.

We previewed the essential role pharmacies would play in getting COVID shots to arms – with accessibility, with equity, and with trust.

And at the time of those briefings we were about one year into the COVID response.

Dedicated pharmacy teams – and other healthcare professionals – already had done so much.

Pharmacies and pharmacy teams stayed open to help meet health and wellness needs.

That alone required extensive planning and adaptation.

They also ramped up extensive COVID testing operations.

And they were at the forefront of the effort to get COVID vaccines into arms.

This year, pharmacies and pharmacy teams have continued to live up to the promise of helping to save Americans from COVID.

ANDERSON (continued):

They are the go-to vaccination solution.

According to government statistics, pharmacies now are giving about 2 of every 3 COVID shots.

Today, we are at a unique time. On one hand, our society is eager to move on from the pandemic.

We are earning that ability – together.

On the other hand, we remain in a public health emergency.

We all still have a role in stopping the spread.

My two main points today reflect both of those factors.

First, as we embrace the future, we as a nation must learn the pandemic's lessons, and act on them.

So, NACDS has prepared three reports.

They pay tribute to the amazing work of the people of pharmacy.

Our most recent report includes a fascinating timeline:

- milestone after milestone of progress throughout the pandemic
- and policy change after policy change that helped make them possible.

And now our nation, our states, and our communities should not roll back this preparedness.

In fact, they should build on it.

We will discuss some of those recommendations.

Even as we look ahead, we remain in a global pandemic.

So my second point is this.

In vaccinating America, we have reached another key moment.

It is taking place in America's pharmacies.

Right now, the people of pharmacy are:

- giving COVID vaccine boosters,
- and giving first-shots to others – including children.

ANDERSON (continued):

In addition, demand is high as Americans confront the Omicron variant...and prepare for holiday travel.

Pharmacy teams also are giving flu vaccinations.

We are hearing today of the risk of a flu and COVID twindemic.

While healthcare workers are tired,
and while there is a national personnel shortage across industries,
healthcare teams are driven by their desire to serve.

There are pharmacists and team members who find deep meaning and strength in the fact that they are saving their patients and their communities. I hear that a lot.

When it comes to pharmacies, let's remember the mantra "we're all in this together."

Consumers can empower themselves to help manage their own experience.

Make a COVID vaccination appointment – as opposed to walking in.

For the near future, NACDS members are reporting that between 25 and 75 percent of their COVID vaccine scheduler capacity is available.

At this unique time, making an appointment makes sense, and will help make vaccinations smoother for everyone.

Another opportunity: being respectful and polite to pharmacy team members. Pharmacy team members do an amazing job – they are consistently ranked as the most accessible healthcare professionals, and among the most trusted.

These professionals are saving lives – so I want to thank those customers who take a moment to thank their pharmacy team.

Thank you again for joining us and thank you in advance for reviewing these NACDS reports.

ROSZAK:

As Steve noted, in recent weeks, NACDS released 3 reports highlighting the central role of pharmacies in the nation's COVID response.

The first report, co-authored by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, demonstrates pharmacies' historic and ongoing commitment to enhancing healthcare access and equity. Pharmacies have long prioritized enhanced access as a cornerstone to achieving better health for all, especially in communities facing disproportionate barriers to care.

The second report provides a blueprint to better leverage pharmacies in the next generation of innovative care delivery within government programs. This report is steeped in research outlining the proven ability for pharmacies and pharmacists to move the needle on better health for patients.

And the third report outlines key insights and lessons learned from retail pharmacies participating in the COVID-19 response. Findings of this report demonstrate that above all – pharmacies continue to value and prioritize the opportunity to serve their communities during this unprecedented time. Consider the following:

- To date, pharmacies have provided more than 180 million COVID vaccine doses through federal programs alone. Those numbers are even higher when including pharmacies' role in state programs.
- And, pharmacies are ramping up to 20,000 COVID testing sites. Many of these efforts have fostered access to care in vulnerable communities.
- Through it all, pharmacies are making an especially meaningful impact on high-risk and underserved populations.

As we considered what we've learned to date throughout the pandemic, three main themes – or recommendations – have risen to the top.

First, pandemic flexibilities granted to pharmacies should not be rolled back. The government should permanently expand pharmacy scope of practice across all states to improve access to care. The pandemic has demonstrated the public's demand for this convenient care. This includes more optimally deploying pharmacy staff at the top of their expertise – and one great example is pharmacy technicians being able to provide vaccinations and testing services.

Second, making these expanded care services permanent and sustainable is key. Specifically, we're talking about coverage and reimbursement. This includes possibly implementing a payment pathway in Medicare Part B for clinical care delivered by pharmacists. Further, action could be taken in the states with respect to viable pathways for pharmacies to sustain these clinical care services.

And, third, reviewing the lessons learned of the pandemic allows us to consider specific details like data reporting, communication, and future emergency preparedness planning. Each of these topics are important as we look ahead beyond the COVID-19 response.

ROSZAK (continued):

While this report specifically gathered insights on pharmacies' experience providing vaccinations and testing to date, our story isn't over. On the horizon is the nation's rollout of oral COVID therapeutics. As has been the case with other topics throughout the pandemic, NACDS is articulating to the government the clear facts about what will be needed to help make deployment of these medications successful for the American people.

Just as pharmacies and their staff have stepped up since day 1 of the pandemic, they continue to adapt and transform with tremendous agility. We continue to see pharmacies implementing creative solutions to address the dynamic health needs of their communities. Especially today – with COVID boosters, flu vaccines, COVID shots for children, and more – pharmacies continue to serve their communities with vigor and creativity.

KOONIN:

Thanks so much—I have three points I want to share with you today.

- First, I had the opportunity while working at CDC during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, to initiate and lead an effort to improve the uptake of pandemic influenza vaccine during the pandemic, by engaging 10 large pharmacy companies to administer pandemic vaccine to the public.
 - We learned so much from that partnership—that leveraging the existing resources and strengths of pharmacies made sense.
 - Pharmacies are well-known and convenient sources of care and in 2009, all states allowed pharmacists to administer flu vaccine to adults.
 - That effort provided over 5 million doses of vaccines to people during the holidays, on the weekends and in the evenings when doctors offices and clinics were typically closed.
 - Based on that experience, CDC began including pharmacies as part of pandemic planning going forward.
 - Although the COVID-19 pandemic presented many issues outside of previous planning scenarios, pharmacies have been doing a stellar job of vaccinating millions of people and adapting along the way to the contours of the pandemic.
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- Second, as we reflect on the experience of this pandemic and in recognition of the expertise and training that pharmacy staff have, it is important to recognize that the mission of pharmacies and public health are aligned.
 - That is, public health endeavors to protect and improve the health of populations and communities and so do pharmacies.
 - This alignment of mission has proved extremely valuable to public health as they would likely not had sufficient personnel to vaccinate millions of Americans multiple times, as pharmacies have over the past year. Pharmacies have “extended the reach” of public health by providing life-saving vaccines and testing services.
 - In addition, public health has a special focus on underserved and hard-to-reach populations and we have seen the herculean efforts that pharmacies have made to reach these groups.
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- Finally, we have learned that pharmacists' and pharmacy executives are committed to helping their communities during a public health emergency.
 - I conducted research a few years ago and found that both pharmacists and these pharmacy leaders strongly expressed their perception that their pharmacy was a key community stakeholder and that serving patients during an emergency was an important goal in response to a pandemic.
 - Pharmacists and pharmacies are partners with public health during an emergency as they are committed and dedicated to patient care.