



September 30, 2021

Joint Statement on the Section 56 Exemption for CDSA Drugs

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Health Canada issued a [section 56 exemption](#) for all drugs under the [Controlled Drugs and Substances Act](#) (CDSA). The purpose of the exemption was to reduce regulatory barriers to support the continuity of care for patients. As the pandemic continues and Health Canada works toward modernizing federal regulations, they have extended the [exemption](#) until September 30, 2026.

The exemption permits:

1. pharmacists to extend or renew an existing prescription for CDSA drugs to ensure continuity of care,
2. pharmacists to transfer prescriptions for CDSA drugs to other pharmacists within Saskatchewan only,
3. prescribers (for example physicians, nurse practitioners, dentists) to issue verbal orders to a pharmacist for CDSA drugs to extend or refill a prescription;
4. pharmacists to prescribe CDSA drugs (at the same dose and for chronic therapy), and
5. pharmacy employees to deliver prescriptions of controlled substances to patients' homes or other locations where they may be residing (i.e., self-isolating).

The Saskatchewan Prescription Review Program partners – Ministry of Health, Saskatchewan College of Pharmacy Professionals, Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association, College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the College of Dental Surgeons of Saskatchewan – have considered the long-term implications of the exemption, with a focus on patient safety and access.

They have agreed to accept the new exemption with the following two provisions for Saskatchewan:

- CDSA drugs may only be **transferred once** within Saskatchewan. While there remains risk of diversion of medications, the [Patient ID Policy](#) alleviates some risk and permitting one transfer may benefit the patient.
- Verbal prescription orders should only be accepted after **every effort** has been made to receive a written or e-prescription from a provider. The rationale for accepting a verbal order must be documented by the pharmacist.