



Communications Plan

February 9, 2021

Modern and Proactive Communication Strategy

Background

Since Health Canada's announcement of the coming into force of the amended Patented Medicines Regulations and the publication of the draft and final Guidelines (the "reforms"), the PMPRB's public visibility has increased dramatically. As such, **opponents of the reforms have been more vocal about the potential negative impacts of their implementation and are spreading disinformation through organized public relation campaigns.**

Although evidence does not support these claims, they appear to be gaining traction in the court of public opinion because they aim to strike fear in people, which is a very effective strategy and one that is difficult to refute through logic and responsive facts and figures,

Issue

Pharmaceutical industry threats to withhold life saving drugs from Canada and human interest stories of Canadians suffering or dying because of lack of access to the latest breakthrough drugs occupy a large share of coverage in the media. **The questions asked by MPs at HESA committee meetings demonstrate that opponents to these reforms have been effective at spreading disinformation.** More recently there have been several articles that explicitly blame the PMPRB and its new Guidelines for delays or interruptions in the supply of COVID-19 vaccines.

Until now, the PMPRB has tended to use a reactive approach to the public relation campaigns of its opponents, with an emphasis on statistics and figures in its messaging.

Objectives

- Accentuate the positive in telling the story about the PMPRB and its reforms.
- Improve the understanding of the human impact of the reforms
 - Ex: Our focus is to put your need first. Our goal is to prevent excessive prices so that all Canadians afford the drugs they need to live healthy and productive lives.
- Reinforce the PMPRB's commitment/importance to protecting Canadians against excessively priced drugs without affecting innovation or access to new medicines.
 - Ex: In order to support your needs, we need to make sure we have a health care system that is sustainable. The reforms ensure that we can afford and access the medicines we need at prices that are reasonable from both the consumer and manufacturer perspective.
- Highlight the benefits for Canadians of the reforms (e.g., savings will enable drug plans to pay for more and better drugs than they could otherwise).
 - Ex: Drugs are getting more and more expensive, thus leaving many Canadians unable to afford treatments for them or members of their family. Those costs are also putting pressure on our public and private drug plans that can no longer

cover all these important drugs. The reforms will allow savings that will enable us to pay for more and better drugs for all.

- Push back more aggressively and proactively on the industry's ongoing disinformation campaign.
 - Ex: Our focus is to put the need of Canadians first. The pharmaceutical industry's threat to withhold drugs from a market is a common tactic they have used with other countries during periods of drug pricing reform, and those countries still benefit from the same level of access as before despite having lower drug prices than Canada.
 - Ex: Despite what industry tells you, clinical trials and the number of new drugs coming to Canada have not gone down since the reforms were announced/adopted.

Strategic considerations

- With the most recent delay of the CiF of the amended Regulations, the prevailing narrative in the media appears to be that the industry has gained the upper hand in slowing/stopping the implementation of the PMPRB reforms. The industry is capitalizing on the additional delay period to ramp up its disinformation campaign and seek to engage the government in negotiations regarding a so-called alternative approach.
- The ongoing campaign has been echoed by some patient associations and other stakeholders who oppose the reforms in terms of disseminating disinformation on access and the possible impact on their respective patient constituencies. **The CF community, CORD and the Best Medicines Coalition have aggressive public relation strategies that are aligned with the messaging promoted by the industry.**
- Stakeholders who are supportive of the reforms are less vocal in the public sphere, thus, creating the impression that the public opinion is tilted against these efforts to lower patented drug prices.
- Changing the perception of the general population on the impact of the reforms after multiple years of lobbying by the industry will take time.
- The storyline of the cases brought forward by the mainstream media, patients associations and the industry focus on a human side, engaging a negative emotional reaction by the audience by appealing to their fears of being denied access to lifesaving medicines. PMPRB communications need to adjust to a more human-interest communication approach by focusing on the positive human impact of the price regulation.

Target audience

- Canadians – general public
- Stakeholders
 - Industry associations and representatives
 - Patient advocacy groups
 - Public and private payers
 - Non- and not-for-profit organizations
 - Academics
- Media
- MPs

General key messages

Access to drugs/putting Canadians first

- It is unacceptable that Canadians have to forego filling prescriptions for cost reasons while we pay among the highest drug prices in the developed world.
- Pharmaceutical companies sell to other countries around the world at much lower prices. Why should we pay more, especially if it means many Canadians can't currently afford the drugs they need to live healthy and productive lives?

Sustainability and balance

- Drugs are getting more and more expensive, thus leaving many Canadians unable to afford treatments for them or members of their family. Those costs are also putting pressure on our public and private drug plans that can no longer cover all these important drugs. The reforms will allow savings that will enable us to pay for more and better drugs for all.
- Our focus is to put the need of Canadians first. The pharmaceutical industry's threat to withhold drugs from a market is a common tactic they have used with other countries during periods of drug pricing reform, and those countries still benefit from better access to new drugs than Canada does, despite having lower drug prices than we do.
- In order to support your needs, we need to make sure we have a health care system that is sustainable. The reforms ensure that we can afford and access the medicines we need at prices that are reasonable from both the consumer and manufacturer perspective.

We listened

- For the past 5 years, we have sought and listened to feedback from all sides: you want affordable and accessible prescription drugs. The industry wants a fair return on its investments so companies can continue to research, develop, and sell medicines. Our Guidelines strike a balance between those competing objectives by gradually reducing the average prices of patented drugs by 6% over the next 10 years. These lower prices will mean more and better access to prescription drugs by making them more affordable while allowing the industry to enjoy the same level of profit it does in many other countries where prices are currently lower than in Canada and access is better.

Mythbusting/Did you know?

Clinical trial and R&D

- We have one of the lowest investment/number of clinical trials compared to our peer countries. In fact, many countries enjoy far greater levels of R&D investment and a clinical trials despite having considerably lower drug prices.

Drug prices

- Prescription drug prices in Canada are among the highest in the developed world. Why is the industry only willing to bring new drugs to Canada if we continue to pay such high prices?
- Don't fall for industry claims that clinical trials and the number of new drugs coming to Canada have gone down since the reforms were announced/adopted. **They are knowingly disseminating false information.**
- In threatening to withhold new drugs from Canada unless we continue to pay among the highest prices in the world, industry is holding Canadian patients for ransom. The industry puts profits first and patients a distant second, despite claims to the contrary.

Specific key messages

The mythbusting document will be used alongside the general key messages to generate specific answers to the disinformation. Those messages and associated facts and figures will be made available on the PMPRB website and promoted through various channels.

Communications approach and tactics

- Use a more human-interest approach when communicating to our key audiences.
- Use a more proactive communication approach to reach our target audiences.
- Promote, broadcast and repeat the general key messages in all communications, when feasible.
- Increase the use of social media:
 - Of the PMPRB twitter account to strengthen the understanding of the PMPRB messages while boosting the amount of followers
 - By creating a FB account to increase our reach to interest groups (patients, academics)
 - Challenge and refute misleading claims and data
 - Create and maintain twitter feeds for the Executive and/or Chairperson
 - Present facts and figures to support the general key messages in a way that is more accessible to the public.
- Leverage the support and/or the understanding of the MPs on the pharmacare to increase awareness of the PMPRB mandate.
- Work more closely with stakeholders who are supportive of the reforms and encourage them to support our social media activity and be more vocal in expressing their support.

Activities	Communication objectives	Who
Develop and promote main general key messages related to the disinformation	Increase the understanding of the general public on key areas where we found important disinformation	Comms
Social Media		
Twitter: #DYD / #TBT	Increase the numbers of follower by using popular # Increase awareness on the key areas where we found disinformation and provide accurate information - Link to the DYK web page on the PMPRB	Comms
Twitter: answering tweets that promote disinformation on Twitter with accurate data	Providing facts supporting the main key messages	Lead : Comms Support : P&EA
PMPRB FB account	Creating a new way to reach the general public	Comms
Research the # trends and using them more widely	Increase the PMPRB visibility in the public sphere	Comms

Engagement through personal Twitter Account (Chairperson & Exec. Dir)	Extend the voices of supportive stakeholders of the reform by retweeting and commenting their public views/engagement.	Lead : Chairperson/Exec. Dir. Support : Comms
Web Site		
New section "Did you know" on the PMPRB home page	Create a new web page where Canadians can easily access the 5 key messages and supportive data	Lead : Comms Support : P&EA
Other activities		
Outreach to supportive stakeholders of the reforms	Coordinate communications efforts to improve the understanding of the reforms and to increase the audience.	Lead : Comms Support : P&EA
Promotional interactive PDF flyers	Ease the access to data and increase the understanding on the facts related to the key areas	Lead : Comms Support : P&EA
Thematic webinars	Present facts and figures to support the general key messages in a way that is more accessible to the public.	Lead : P&EA Support : Comms
MP kits -flyers -emails	Increase the understanding of the role of the PMPRB in the implementation of the pharmacare while promoting the key messages and its supportive data.	Lead : Comms Support : P&EA
Informative Video	Create and promote an informative video on the mandate of the PMPRB and how we operate.	Lead : Comms Support : P&EA

Budget

Expecting expenses:

Flyers (6 000\$)

Video (20 000\$)

Webinar (30 000\$)

Total: 56 000\$

Evaluation

A thorough evaluation of each communications product and activity will be undertaken through various methods, including:

- Social media metrics (e.g., click-throughs, replies, re-tweets)

- Media monitoring (i.e., online, and broadcast)
- Public enquiries or feedback submitted to the PMPRB and Health Canada / Minister of Health
- Web metrics