CAPhO Canadian Association of Pharmacy in Oncology

Securing Canada's Life-Saving Drug Supply

Roughly One in Three of Canada's Most Serious Drug Shortages Affects Cancer Care

CAPhO supports Health Canada's Building Resilience: Health Canada's Plan to Address Health Product Shortages (2024-2028) and the important work already underway to strengthen Canada's drug supply chain, including the Critical and Vulnerable Drug List and Tier 3 shortage monitoring processes.

Despite these efforts, cancer medicines remain particularly vulnerable to supply disruptions. Approximately one-third of Canada's highest-impact (Tier 3) shortages involve oncology therapies, supportive-care medications, or diagnostic agents. These include critical cancer drugs such as:

Cyclophosphamide	**Ifosfamide**	**Etoposide**	**Dacarbazine**
Mesna	**Aprepitant**	**Dexamethasone**	**Raltitrexed**

Many of these medications are generic with limited suppliers and few therapeutic alternatives. Global manufacturing disruptions can therefore result in treatment delays, therapy modifications, and inequitable access for cancer patients.

Studies and Experts are Sounding the Alarm

Fellow leading cancer organizations have identified oncology drug shortages as a growing threat to patient care:

Canadian Cancer Society

Canadian Cancer Society

Researchers at the University of Toronto

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO)

ASCO® AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CLINICAL ONCOLOGY

The concern is that shortages can lead to treatment delays, rationing of therapy, use of less effective alternatives, increased risk of cancer recurrence, and poorer patient outcomes. Recent cisplatin and carboplatin shortages already forced Canadian cancer centres into conservation strategies and difficult treatment allocation decisions.



American Society of Clinical Oncology. Drug shortages: a crisis in cancer care [Internet]. Alexandria (VA): ASCO; [cited 2026 Nov 12]. Available from: https://www.asco.org/practice-patients/practice-support/drug-shortages/drug-shortages-crisis-cancer-care

Canadian Cancer Society. Cancer drug shortages require long-term solutions [Internet]. Toronto (ON): Canadian Cancer Society; [cited 2026 Nov 12]. Available from: https://cancer.ca/en/about-us/media-releases/2023/cancer-drug-shortages

Choi A, Tadrous M, Gomes T, Mamdani MM, Juurlink DN, Wintemute K, et al. Drug shortages and supply chain disruptions in Canada. JAMA Netw Open.

604-984-6455 **CAPhO.org** info@CAPhO.org CAPhO @caphoacpho

The Scale of the Challenge Remains Significant

In 2024-25, Canada recorded **2,588** new drug shortage reports and... **1,772** active or unresolved shortages at year end, demonstrating that supply disruptions continue to pose a substantial risk to patient care.

The Hidden Cost to Patients, Family, and the Cancer System

- Erode patient trust in the health care system.
- May compromise treatment outcomes when no suitable alternatives exist.
- Require significant pharmacy, clinical, and operational resources to manage shortages, implement alternatives, and communicate changes.
- Cause moral distress for clinicians unable to provide optimal care.
- Create uncertainty, anxiety, and additional stress for patients and families.
- Divert time and resources away from direct patient care and cancer treatment delivery.

Oncology drug shortages extend far beyond procurement challenges, impacting patients, providers, and the overall delivery of cancer care.

The Bottom Line

Cancer medicines are not interchangeable commodities. Ensuring a secure supply of essential oncology drugs is a patient safety, cancer care, and national health security imperative.

CAPhO calls on the Government of Canada to develop a National Oncology Drug Supply Security Action Plan that builds upon existing Health Canada initiatives and prioritizes access to essential cancer medicines for all Canadians.

The Action Plan should:

1. Prioritize critical oncology medicines within existing federal shortage prevention and mitigation programs.
2. Strengthen Canadian manufacturing capacity for essential generic oncology drugs and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs).
3. Expand domestic manufacturing of generic oncology drugs through government incentives, long-term contracts, and pricing stability to support reliable manufacturing.
4. Improve oncology-specific supply chain monitoring, forecasting, and risk assessment.
5. Reduce dependence on single manufacturers and foreign supply sources for critical cancer medicines.