

Position Statement on Accessible Prescription Medication Information

May 2017

Issue...

Independently identifying prescription medication has been a long-standing challenge for Canadians who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted. Compounding this challenge is the need to access and understand critical prescription medication information (APMI). This information is usually provided in a small print format on a label affixed to the prescription bottle and is often accompanied by additional information on pieces of detached paper. Prescription medication information provided only in print form can present insurmountable challenges for Canadians who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted, which can lead to serious health and safety concerns.

Background...

Accessing the critical and essential medication information on the print label of a prescription is not possible for many people who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted.

Pharmacists are required to verbally provide an overview of the prescription medication, including dosage instructions, side effects and warnings when dispensing the medication. While this is helpful for most sighted people, consumers who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted struggle to independently identify the medication and its related information. Compounding this challenge is the fact that medications often demand special instructions (i.e., take with food, do not take with grapefruit juice, consume on a full stomach, etc.). There are also prescription refill numbers, medication expiry dates, side effects, warnings and other details listed on the print label. The challenge of accessing this critical information increases exponentially when multiple prescription medications are required to manage a person's health when they are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted.

Pharmacists often recommend to a person who is blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted to acquire their prescription medications in customized blister packs. However, blister packs are not practical when it comes to a host of medications such as "as needed" medications, topical ointments and creams, consumable liquid medications, inhalers, etc. - nor do they provide any method of advising the consumer what the side effects, warnings or other details may be with these medications.

Not all Individuals who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted access information the same way; and prescription medication information must be made available for the individual's needs – in an accessible format they can understand and access.

Technology which enables a person who is blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted to independently access prescription medication information is currently available in two basic forms; the first are devices that support a voice recording of the information from the medication's print label and the second option offers prescription medication information encoded into a microchip or onto a Radio Frequency Identification, (RFID), label which then uses audible synthesized speech to deliver the medication information. There are advantages and disadvantages to both with the final choice resting with the dispensing pharmacy.

The right for persons with disabilities to access information is set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which the Canadian Government (with the support of all provinces and territories) ratified in March 2010. Article 25 – Health, section D of the CRPD states, “Require health professionals to provide care of the same quality to persons with disabilities as to others, including based on free and informed consent by, inter alia, raising awareness of the human rights, dignity, autonomy and needs of persons with disabilities through training and the promulgation of ethical standards for public and private health care;”¹

This position statement offers a series of agreed upon recommendations aimed at providing accessible prescription medication information, (APMI), enabling Canadians who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted to independently, confidently and safely manage their prescription medications.

Recommendations...

1. APMI must be affixed to the medication container that contains the actual medication (wherever possible) and not the medication's outer packaging.
2. APMI should be made available in both of Canada's official languages.
3. APMI must contain:
 - Patient's name
 - Name and strength of medication
 - Dosage instructions
 - Prescribing doctor's name
 - Refills remaining
 - Dispensing date
 - Prescription number

¹ See UN CRPD available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx#3>

- Dispensing pharmacy name and telephone number
 - Potential side effects and warnings
4. APMI must be available in a format that meets the consumer's needs whether it is audible, large print - minimum 14point font or Braille. delivery mechanisms which leverage mobile devices should also be made available but not at the exclusion of other mediums of communications. These technologies could include Internet access, QR code readers or artificial intelligence. While these technologies have greatly enhanced accessibility for consumers with sight loss, they are not readily available to all and as such can only be offered as another medium by which to convey essential APMI.
 5. Devices that support the delivery of APMI in an audible format must offer a volume control and provide an earphone jack for privacy.
 6. Prescription medications requiring APMI in an audio format need to be prepared and dispensed in a timeframe reasonably equivalent to that of a prescription of the same type where APMI is not required.
 7. Prescription medications requiring APMI in audible, large print or Braille formats can take longer to prepare and dispense; the delivery time will not exceed 48 hours from the time the prescription is presented to the pharmacist to the time when the prescription is available for pick up by the consumer.

The above recommendations have been endorsed by the following organizations:

[Access for Sight Impaired Consumers](#)

[Alberta Society For the Visually Impaired – Northern Alberta](#)

[Vision Impaired Resource Network](#)

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