

2 *Participation in the PharmaCare Program and PharmaNet Connections*

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2.3 What is PharmaNet?

[June 1, 2015: Updated to reflect the requirements and terminology of the Provider Regulation and Information Management Regulation]

What does PharmaNet do?

- PharmaNet is a secure computer network that links all British Columbia community pharmacies and other authorized sites to a central set of databases.
- PharmaNet access is available, on request, to community and hospital pharmacies, hospital emergency departments, hospitals, designated mental health facilities, medical practices, and non-pharmaceutical and medical device suppliers that are enrolled as device providers with PharmaCare. Permitted levels of access vary.

>> Learn more about the information each type of user can access in Section 9, [Privacy](#).

- PharmaNet maintains various types of information, including:
 - patient demographic information
 - patient medication histories
 - drug information
 - drug-to-drug interaction information
 - patient clinical information (such as allergies, adverse drug reactions) when reported by patients and recorded by pharmacists or authorized physicians and their supervised staff
 - historical patient claims information
 - PharmaCare adjudication rules
- The PharmaNet patient profile does not capture information about:
 - drugs dispensed outside community pharmacies, or purchased outside BC or over the Internet
 - over-the-counter medications (unless specifically entered)
 - discontinuations (unless the prescriber or patient has advised the pharmacist)
 - drugs entered under the wrong Personal Health Number
 - samples provided through physician offices
- PharmaNet helps pharmacists to identify and warn patients about potentially harmful medication interactions, unintended duplications, and risks from the misuse of prescription drugs.
- The use of PharmaNet is not intended as a substitute for professional judgment. Information on PharmaNet is not exhaustive and cannot be relied upon as complete. The absence of a warning about a drug or drug combination is not an indication that the drug or drug combination is safe, appropriate or effective in any given patient. Health care professionals should confirm information obtained from PharmaNet, and ensure no additional relevant information exists, before making patient care decisions.
- When a claim is submitted on PharmaNet, the following is displayed:
 - a patient medication history showing medications dispensed in the previous 14 months (or, if preferred, the last 15 dispenses), as well as any over-the-counter medications that may have been recorded

- Drug Use Evaluation (DUE) alerts regarding any potential drug therapy or dispensing problems
>>Learn more about Section 3.14, [Drug Use Evaluation](#).
- all clinical conditions and adverse drug reactions previously recorded on PharmaNet.
- On request, current patient-education drug monographs can also be provided by PharmaNet.
>>Learn more in the Section 3.15, [Drug Monograph Information](#).

How does PharmaNet adjudicate claims?

- All prescriptions dispensed in B.C. community pharmacies must be entered on PharmaNet, **whether or not**
 - the patient is covered by PharmaCare
 - the pharmacy is enrolled as a provider in the PharmaCare program.

HIV/AIDS medications are entered in PharmaNet only when they are dispensed at a community pharmacy. HIV/AIDS medications dispensed at the British Columbia Centre for Excellence are not entered in PharmaNet.

- **All claims by device providers who are connected to PharmaNet must also be submitted via PharmaNet.**
- **At the time an item is dispensed, the provider transmits a claim on PharmaNet, including the following information:**
 - patient (e.g., patient’s PHN)
 - prescriber
 - pharmacy **or device provider** (e.g., the pharmacy **Site ID** assigned by PharmaCare, security qualifiers)
 - prescription/**product information** (e.g., **product cost**, DIN, quantity, days’ supply, drug cost, dispensing fee).
- PharmaNet uses the information to “adjudicate” the claim according to current PharmaCare policies. When adjudicating a claim, PharmaNet:
 - validates **the provider** security authorizations
 - checks for the presence of a patient **protective word** on their PharmaNet record
 - checks the patient’s eligibility for PharmaCare coverage (e.g., Does the patient have MSP coverage? For which PharmaCare plan is the patient eligible? Does the patient have any restrictions?)
 - checks the product’s eligibility as a PharmaCare benefit for the patient (e.g., Is the **product** a benefit? Is it included in the plan(s) for which the patient is eligible? Does the product have any restrictions?)
 - determines the cost distribution (e.g., How much, if any, of the cost is covered by PharmaCare? How much, if any, will count toward the deductible? How much, if any, of a dispensing fee will be paid by PharmaCare? For what portion of the cost is the patient responsible (“co-payment”)?)

- For patients covered under the income-based [Fair PharmaCare plan](#), PharmaNet accumulates any accepted amount towards the family's or individual's annual deductible and family maximum.
- Based on the patient's plan and deductible requirement (if any) and the patient's total expenditures to date, PharmaNet returns the adjudication result to the **provider** using standard response/status codes of the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA). These codes indicate how the claim was adjudicated or why it was rejected.
- **The provider's** local software reports the cost distribution on the prescription receipt.
- Note: A **provider** does not need to know which PharmaCare plan the patient is covered under in order to submit a claim on PharmaNet.
- In certain cases, **pharmacists and device providers** may enter an "intervention" or "exception" code (CPhA) to bypass normal adjudication rules (e.g., for duplicate prescriptions).

>> For the authoritative list of response/status and intervention/exception codes, refer to the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) Pharmacy Claims Standard. Copies of the Pharmacy Claim Standard may be purchased from: Canadian Pharmacists Association at service@pharmacists.ca.

Why do **providers need a local, **onsite** system?**

- PharmaNet does not replace the need for **onsite** systems, also known as local systems.
- Local systems act as "front ends" to PharmaNet. Local systems may also provide non-PharmaNet features strictly for **provider** operations.
- **Providers** must use local-system software that a software vendor has had tested and deemed "compliant" by the **Ministry of Health** before they can connect to PharmaNet.

>> For more information, refer to Section [2.4](#).

>> For information on changing your local system software, refer to Section [2.5](#).

- Each approved local system software vendor has signed a Service Level Agreement with Health Data Access Services. This agreement sets out problem severity levels and resolution targets. Your software vendor can provide a copy of the agreement on request.

How are claims submitted?

- Processing a PharmaCare claim involves both your local system and PharmaNet.
- Your local system interface determines the manner in which a claim is entered. Your software vendor can provide any information you may need.
- Learn more about PharmaNet transactions and adjudication in the [PharmaNet Professional and Software Compliance Standards](#), available in PDF format on the Health Data Access Services website.
- For information on using your local system, contact your software vendor or consult your system documentation.

2.4 Connecting to PharmaNet

[June 1, 2015: Updated to reflect the requirements and terminology of the Provider Regulation and Information Management Regulation]

General Policy Description

- All community pharmacies must connect to PharmaNet even if they are not enrolled as PharmaCare providers.
- Hospital out-patient pharmacies that wish to submit claims to PharmaCare must connect to PharmaNet.
- Device providers have the option of connecting to PharmaNet. Connecting to PharmaNet can simplify device provider claims procedures and improve customer service.
- Eligible practitioners within medical practices and facilities such as emergency departments, hospitals and designated mental health facilities may also connect to PharmaNet to obtain dispensing information for their patients. These practitioners do not submit claims to PharmaCare, and cannot view claims information.

Policy Details

- All requests for access to PharmaNet must be approved by the Ministry and, for pharmacies and most device providers, the College of Pharmacists of BC.
- All persons who access PharmaNet must have signed the appropriate agreements and/or undertakings of confidentiality and security before they connect to PharmaNet.
- PharmaNet access cannot be granted to sites located outside B.C.
- Any online PharmaNet **transaction** must be processed by the B.C. site (that is, it cannot be processed remotely from another location)
- Any personal information obtained from PharmaNet must remain in B.C.

>> For more information on privacy requirements for PharmaNet connections, refer to Section 9, [Privacy](#).

Pharmacies

Pre-Conditions for PharmaNet Connection

- All enquiries regarding PharmaNet connection for a new community pharmacy must be directed to the [College of Pharmacists of British Columbia \(CPBC\)](#). This includes new pharmacies that will be part of a “gateway system” for which PharmaCare does not need to install or connect equipment.
- After a pharmacy has made their request through the [CPBC](#), Information Support at HIBC can answer any further questions.

>> [Contact HIBC Information Support](#).

CPBC Licensing Requirements

- Before a pharmacy can connect to PharmaNet, the CPBC must:
 - receive and approve all documentation related to the application for a new pharmacy (including a signed Acknowledgement of Completion of the Confidentiality Procedures, a copy of which will be forwarded to PharmaCare) , and
 - receive payment of the license fee.

>> See the full list of required documents in the CPBC's [Pharmacy Licensure in British Columbia - Information Guide and Resources](#).

- The CPBC notifies PharmaCare of its preliminary approval of each new pharmacy's licence application. Information Support at HIBC can then initiate the PharmaNet connection process.

Pharmacy Point-of-sale (POS) Software Requirements

- Pharmacies must use approved, compliance-tested software to connect to PharmaNet.
- Compliance evaluations are performed by HIBC and the staff of Data Access, Research and Stewardship (Health Sector IM/IT Division, Ministry of Health) plus a member of a regulatory body where appropriate. The evaluation considers all aspects of PharmaNet functionality available on the local software, whether or not all functions are/will be used by the pharmacy to confirm that:
 - the local software complies with requirements
 - local system functions and processes provide accurate results
- Pharmacies must have selected an approved software vendor before they submit their request for connection; the vendor's name must be provided as part of the application.

>> See the [list of approved software vendors](#) on the Medical Access to PharmaNet webpage.

Confidentiality Undertaking Requirements

- Before PharmaNet connection can proceed, Information Support at Health Insurance BC must receive a copy of the pharmacy-signed confidentiality document (*Acknowledgement of Completion of the Confidentiality Procedures*) from the CPBC. A signed confidentiality document cannot be accepted directly from the pharmacy.
- Enrollment as a PharmaCare provider is required for billing PharmaCare.

Connection Requirements and Time Frames

- Depending on the capabilities of their chosen software, pharmacies may connect to PharmaNet either:
 - over the province-wide SPAN/BC network, or
 - over a secure Internet connection (the POS software provides the security using HN Secure). Connection is provided by the Internet Service Provider (ISP) of the pharmacy's choice.

For pharmacies connecting to PharmaNet over the Span BC network

- The time frame to install equipment and connect a new pharmacy to PharmaNet using the Span BC network is **at least 50 business days** from the time the CPBC notifies PharmaCare of its approval.

- If the pharmacy wishes the connection to be completed in less time, it must submit a letter to Information Support at HIBC.

PharmaCare/Information Support will endeavour to meet the requested time frame, but the relevant telecommunications company (which installs the circuit, modem and router) may not approve the requested schedule.

- **Span BC Connection Requirements:**
 - Upon approval of all documentation and payment of license fees, the CPBC will notify PharmaCare. The Ministry is responsible for—and, through HIBC, will coordinate the installation of—telecommunication lines, modem and router to the demarcation point within the pharmacy or building.
 - It is the pharmacy’s responsibility to ensure that all internal wiring, conduits and power are in place to allow connection to the demarcation point. Depending on the distance from the demarcation point to the pharmacy, different cabling options should be discussed with the telecommunication supplier.
 - Direct any questions about the specific requirements for installing telecommunications lines, router and modem to Information Support at HIBC.

For pharmacies connecting to PharmaNet over the Internet

- To connect to PharmaNet via the Internet, pharmacies must use compliance-tested software that includes HN Secure.
- Pharmacies are responsible for obtaining Internet connection services from an Internet Service Provider (ISP) and having their local system software vendor install and test the software before they access PharmaNet.

Connection and Activation Time Frames

- Your system vendor can provide an estimate of the time it will take them to set up and test your local system’s connection.
- Upon approval of all documentation and payment of license fees, the CPBC will notify PharmaCare. PharmaCare will register the pharmacy in the PharmaNet security system, ready for activation. This process may take up to ten business days.
- Connection to PharmaNet will be activated once the CPBC notifies Information Support at HIBC that the *Acknowledgement of Completion of the Confidentiality Procedures* form has been submitted.

Activating the connection to PharmaNet

- Connection to PharmaNet will be activated once the CPBC notifies Information Support at HIBC that the *Acknowledgement of Completion of the Confidentiality Procedures* form has been submitted.

Device Providers

- PharmaNet allows device providers who have enrolled with PharmaCare to submit online claims but does not allow them to access a patient’s full medication history.
- The benefits of connecting to PharmaNet include:

- claims on PharmaNet adjudicate in real time, providing immediate information on the portion of a claim to be paid by the patient and the portion (if any) covered by PharmaCare;
- not having to submit manual claim forms; and
- eliminating the two- to three-week turnaround time required for processing manual claims and issuing payment for them.

Connection requirements and timeframes

- **Device providers must have enrolled with PharmaCare before they can request access to PharmaNet and submit claims. For enrollment details, see “PharmaCare Provider Enrollment” on the [Information for Device Providers](#) webpage.**
- **For general information on the connection requirements and timeframes, please refer to the [process for pharmacies](#) above.** For more detailed information, see the Prosthetic/Orthotic Program:
 - [General statement of program policy](#)
 - [Detailed policy and procedural requirements](#)
- To request access to PharmaNet, contact Information Support at [HIBC](#).

Insulin Pump Manufacturers/Distributors

- **Insulin pump manufacturers/distributors (formerly “Medical Device Distributors”)** may sell their products either directly to the patient or to an authorized re-seller such as a pharmacy or medical supply store.
- To participate in PharmaCare, **they must enroll with PharmaCare. Insulin pump manufacturers/distributors may be** granted limited access to PharmaNet.

>> *Learn more about registering for access to PharmaNet on the [Medical Device Distributors \(MDD\) Online Claims Access to PharmaNet](#) webpage.*

Out-of-Province Sites

- Out-of-Province (OOP) **sites** are not connected to PharmaNet.
- However, PharmaCare may allow out-of-province (OOP) **sites** to participate in PharmaCare. These are OOP **sites**, closer than the nearest British Columbia **provider**, serving British Columbia residents in border communities.
- OOP **sites** must **submit manual claims** to PharmaCare in the same way as in-province **device providers** that are **not** connected to PharmaNet.

>> See [Section 4.1](#) *Claims by Offline and Out-of Province Suppliers in the PharmaCare Policy Manual* and [Section 9.4](#) *of the Prosthetic and Orthotic Program’s Detailed Policies and Procedures Manual*.

Medical Practices

- Medical Practice Access to PharmaNet allows authorized medical practitioners to request and receive up-to-date records of medications dispensed to a patient, in a timely and secure manner, at each registered medical practice.
- Access to PharmaNet aims to enhance patient care by providing complete, accurate and comprehensive patient and drug information.

- This service is available for physicians in medical practices and supervised persons acting on their behalf.
- Physicians may register to access PharmaNet from one or more sites at which they practice. They may access PharmaNet only from within the sites for which they have registered.
- Physicians who wish to access PharmaNet from health authority facilities must do so using Hospital Access to PharmaNet or Emergency Department Access to PharmaNet.

>> Learn more about [Medical Practice Access to PharmaNet \(MPAP\)](#).

Emergency Departments

- This service permits authorized individuals in hospital emergency departments, and diagnostic and treatment centres, to access patient medication profiles to assist in determination of patient therapy, in a timely and secure manner.

>> Learn more about [Emergency Department Access to PharmaNet \(EDAP\)](#).

Hospitals

- Hospital Access to PharmaNet (HAP) allows authorized physicians and pharmacists to request and receive up-to-date records of medications dispensed to a patient, in a timely and secure manner, at each registered hospital or designated mental health facility (DMHF).
- This service is available for physicians and pharmacists in a hospital or DMHF and authorized persons acting on the physician's behalf.

>> Learn more about [Hospital Access to PharmaNet \(HAP\)](#).

Wireless Access

- The Ministry of Health allows access to PharmaNet over a secure wireless Local Area Network only when all required standards have been met. Sites that use wireless networks may have to sign Attestations of Compliance before implementing the network.
- Use of the wireless network must comply with the restrictions set forth in “PharmaNet Access Restrictions” in [Section 9.3, Access to Patient Information](#).

>> Learn more about [Requirements for Wireless Access to PharmaNet](#).

2.5 Changes to PharmaNet Connections

[June 1, 2015: Updated to reflect the requirements and terminology of the Provider Regulation and Information Management Regulation]

General Policy Description

All PharmaCare providers must inform PharmaCare of any changes to their means of connecting to PharmaNet, such as software changes or changes to the equipment used to connect to PharmaNet.

All changes must be reported to the appropriate Ministry representatives **before the change is made** so that they can update their records to preserve the provider's connection to PharmaNet. Unanticipated changes should be reported as soon as possible afterwards to preserve or restore the provider's connection.

Policy Details

Types of change to report

- The following types of changes must be reported

Changes to Local system software	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade to a new version Change from one vendor's software to another vendor's
Changes to means of connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change from Span BC to connection over the Internet via HN Secure Installing new modem or router
Renovations or relocations that affect equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For Span BC connections: renovations that affect Ministry-installed telecommunications equipment (e.g., modem, router and cabling) or connection/ demarcation points For HN Secure connections over the Internet: installation of a new router or modem; change in an organization's Internet Protocol (IP) address
Network Additions or Modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adding new workstations or Internet protocol (IP) addresses Implementing a secure wireless Local Area Network
Closures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closing a site Decommissioning access to PharmaNet at a site

Who to contact about the change

- Unless otherwise specified, the authorized representatives should contact the appropriate Ministry or HIBC representatives when dealing with changes to their organization's PharmaNet connection.

B.C. community pharmacies Hospital in-patient and out-patient pharmacies Device providers (except for insulin pump manufacturers/distributors)	contact PharmaCare Information Support, HIBC
Hospital emergency departments Health authority facilities	contact Health Data Access Services (DAS), Ministry of Health

Insulin pump manufacturers/distributors	
Community health practices	

- Providers may also have to submit details about their proposed changes on the [PharmaCare Provider Change \(HLTH 5433\)](#) form.

Required prior notice timelines

- Depending upon the type of change being made, the Ministry may need up to 50 business days to process the change.
- To determine how much time a proposed change will take, contact Information Support at HIBC.

2.6 Dealing with PharmaNet Network Outages

[June 1, 2015: Updated to reflect the requirements and terminology of the Provider Regulation and Information Management Regulation]

PharmaNet Outages

- If PharmaCare knows that PharmaNet is going to be unavailable—for example, to make emergency changes—the PharmaNet Help Desk attempts to notify affected **users**, either by telephone (if the number of **users** affected is limited) or through a fan-out message (if all **users** will be affected).
- Emergency change windows are communicated using a fan-out message, should time permit.

Regular Change Window

- An eight-hour maintenance interval is scheduled every Thursday morning, from 12:01 a.m. to 8 a.m. This change window is required for routine and scheduled maintenance on PharmaNet.
- Any alteration to this regular change window is communicated in a [PharmaNet Newsletter](#).

Business Options When PharmaNet is Unavailable

- Occasionally PharmaNet is unavailable. Network disruptions can arise from power cuts, problems with regional or core routers, phone-line problems, an unexpected spike in transaction volumes, or failures/errors in computer hardware or software.
- Normally, the first sign of a network disruption is a message from the local system. Typically the local system attempts to communicate with PharmaNet but fails. The system then notifies you that the network is unavailable (with error messages such as “timeout” or “not connected to host”).
- Pharmacies have two options when PharmaNet is unavailable (“down”):
 - **Dispense prescriptions offline**—Enter prescriptions into your local system until PharmaNet is available. This option allows you to operate almost normally but you will not have access to DUE or adjudication results until PharmaNet becomes available.
 - When PharmaNet is back online, your local system sends the accumulated transactions as a batch to PharmaNet for DUE checking and adjudication.
 - As soon as convenient, review the DUE results and take action as appropriate.

See [Dispensing Offline](#) below for details.

- **Stop dispensing prescriptions until PharmaNet is back online.** This disrupts pharmacy business but may be necessary if, for example, your local system is also inoperable.
- **Device providers can submit claims for adjudication once PharmaNet is operational again.**

Dispensing Offline

- Processing prescriptions offline calls on professional judgment in treating each patient. Pharmacists must also decide how to deal with payments.
- Since there are no pre-set deductibles for Fair PharmaCare, it may be difficult for pharmacies to anticipate an individual’s level of PharmaCare coverage.

Offline payment options

- When operating offline, a pharmacy can flag a claim as “pay provider” or “pay cardholder.” When the batched claims are transmitted to PharmaNet and claims are adjudicated, the pharmacy (provider) or patient (cardholder) is reimbursed appropriately.

Pay Cardholder	Collect payment from the patient. PharmaCare will automatically reimburse the patient appropriately
Pay Provider	Do not collect payment from the patient. PharmaNet will automatically reimburse the pharmacy.

- You may choose to dispense the full prescription or an emergency supply that will tide the patient over until PharmaNet is operational again.

Processing prescriptions offline when the PHN is unknown

- Pharmacy software restricts your ability to process a prescription without the patient PHN. When PharmaNet is unavailable, a PHN search is not possible and a PHN cannot be assigned.

To Process a Prescription Claim Offline When PHN Unknown

- 1 Submit the prescription claim as usual, entering 0009999999998 as the PHN.

Once PharmaNet is online, the local system submits the batched transaction to PharmaNet. PharmaNet will reject it.

- 2 When PharmaNet rejects the batched claim, search for, or assign, a valid PHN as if processing the prescription normally.
- 3 Re-submit the claim on PharmaNet.

Note: PharmaNet will return the patient medication history and DUE results.

- 4 As soon as convenient, review the medication history and DUE results and take appropriate follow-up action as required.

2.7 *Fan-Out Messages*

- A fan-out is a means of transmitting urgent messages on PharmaNet to users. Messages can be transmitted to individual **users or locations, to specific groups by geographic area, to all PharmaNet-connected pharmacies in British Columbia, to hospital pharmacies, etc.**
- Messages are sent as attachments to regular PharmaNet transactions returned to pharmacies.
- CPBC: The message must be displayed and printed before the next transaction begins. The printout should be retained in a log accessible to all pharmacy staff.
- Only message types that are listed in the Compliance Standards Documentation for PharmaNet are sent via a fan-out.
- The PharmaNet Coordinator (or designate) at the CPBC may transmit a message about:
 - written forgery
 - verbal forgery
 - stolen prescription pad
 - other important topics approved by the CPBC.
- The CPBC has authorized PharmaCare to transmit messages in order to:
 - announce an unscheduled PharmaNet outage
 - request a batch submission of prescriptions accumulated over an extended outage
- CPBC: Pharmacists may alert the CPBC to the need for a fan-out by contacting the CPBC between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, by telephone at:
 - (604) 733-2440, 1-800-491-6333 or 1-800-663-1940.
- After hours and on weekends, messages may be left on voice mail at:
 - (604) 733-2440, local 410.