



NSCP Approach to Addressing Pharmacy Practice Environment Challenges

The NSCP initiated work in 2019 (with further updates in 2020 and 2021) to better understand existing research regarding practice environment challenges and their links to patient safety. A literature review was conducted to synthesize available evidence to support and further understand the current pharmacy practice context, and to explore the linkage between workplace environment challenges/burnout and negative outcomes for pharmacy practitioners and patients.

Subsequently, the NSCP sought to explore the current state of the community pharmacy practice environment in Nova Scotia, including insights from key sector stakeholders about their opinion of current conditions and what opportunities for positive improvement are underway or planned. Interviews were conducted with 20 pharmacy practitioners in late 2021 to provide further Nova Scotia context and gain first-hand understanding of the current state of the provincial community pharmacy practice environment.

Additionally, nine key sector stakeholders were interviewed in early 2022 for further insights from the following areas: retail pharmacy businesses (RPB), insurance/third party payers (TPP), pharmacy regulatory authorities (PRA), and non-pharmacy regulatory authorities (NPRA).

Finally, a pharmacy manager survey was also conducted in early 2022 to explore manager perceptions of current workplace environment challenges, including their impact on standards of practice and patient safety.

Literature Review Findings

The literature review summarized three main topics related to the changing pharmacy environment and the impacts on pharmacy professionals and subsequently the care received by the public:

- Topic 1 describes research on professional burnout and job dissatisfaction, as well as the various operations and human resource challenges that exacerbate high workloads and overwhelming work environments.
- Topic 2 describes changes to the pharmacy practice environment and their impact on pharmacists' burnout and job dissatisfaction, and ultimately practice quality and patient safety.
- Topic 3 describes how workplace factors impact patient safety, service quality, errors and omissions, and other various factors.

The findings support the linkage between pharmacy professionals feeling overwhelmed and overworked and negative outcomes related to: professional burnout and job dissatisfaction, diminishing service quality, reduced service offerings, unmet patient expectations and health needs, and an increased risk for errors and omissions and patient safety.

Pharmacy Practitioner Interview Findings

Interviews with 20 Nova Scotian pharmacy practitioners provided a better understanding of how these factors were at play currently in the province and further supported literature review findings. Interview findings identified practice environment challenges impacting patient safety related to five main themes:

1. Pharmacy Practitioner Workloads/Demand for Pharmacy Services
2. Accessibility of Pharmacy Professionals (i.e., on-demand services)
3. Scope of Practice
4. Labour Models
5. Staffing Levels

Findings were validated through engagement with original interview participants, and more broadly through a survey to 70 additional pharmacy practitioners in Nova Scotia. Notable validation survey results are outlined below:

- 84% of participants indicated that their current workload levels are unsustainable
- 70% of participants indicated they felt their pharmacy's staffing levels are inadequate to meet patient demands for services
- 80% of participants indicated they feel burnt out because of their work
- 77% of survey participants indicated that current pharmacy practice challenges are resulting in a reduced standard of care at their pharmacy
- 75% indicated that current pharmacy practice challenges are resulting in a risk to patient safety at their pharmacy

Sector Stakeholder Interview Findings

Interviews were conducted with key sector stakeholders from retail pharmacy businesses, insurance/third party payers, pharmacy regulatory authorities, and non-pharmacy regulatory authorities (NPRA) to gain additional perspectives on factors impacting current conditions and insight into improvement initiatives underway or planned. There was general consensus from those interviewed that there are significant challenges related workload and HR capacity; however, not all participants acknowledged that these conditions are impacting patient safety. There was also acknowledgment of the importance of this work and willingness to cooperate and collaborate with the NSCP from many of those interviewed.

Pharmacy Manager Survey Findings

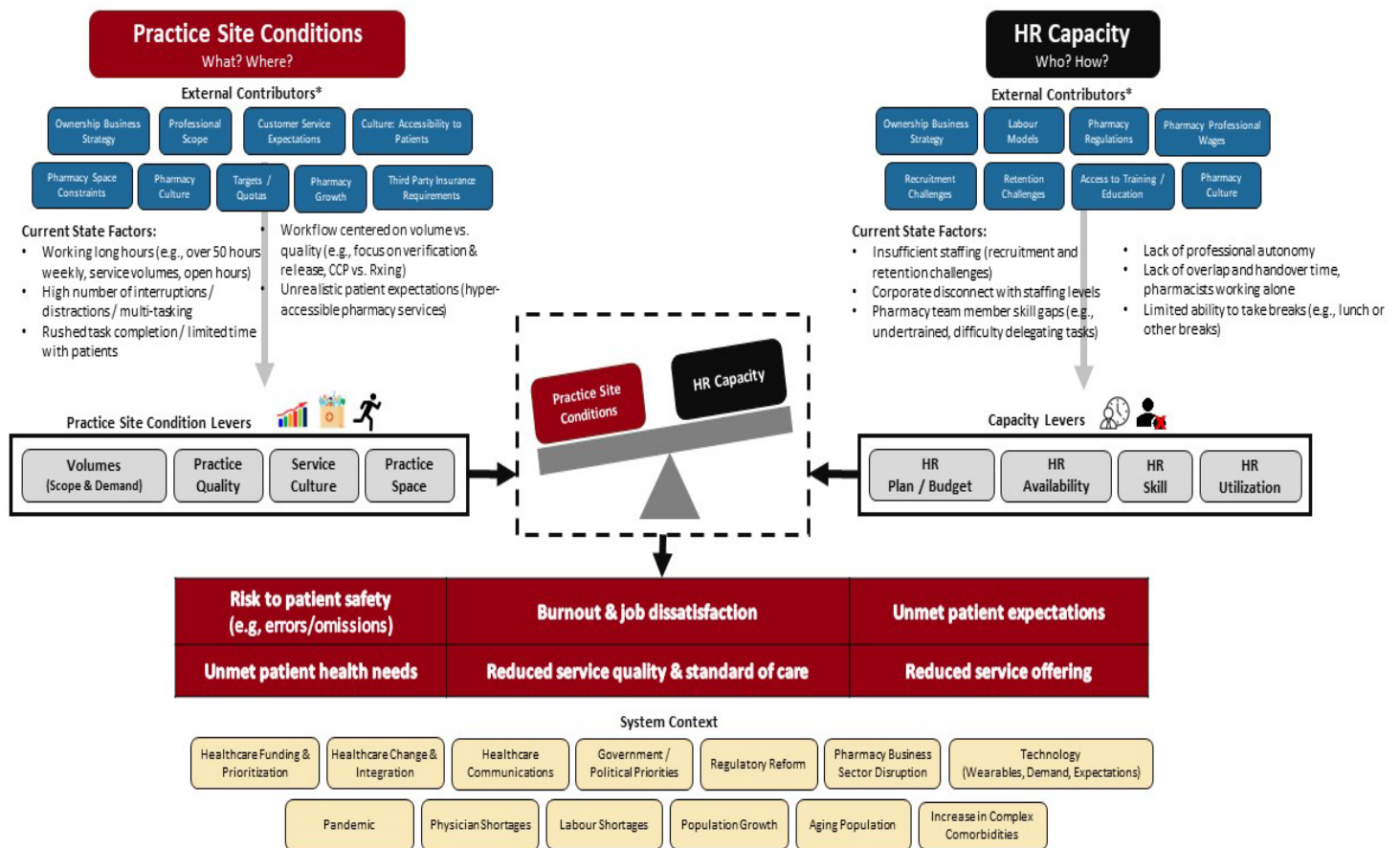
The NSCP conducted a survey with pharmacy managers in January 2022 to assess perceptions of whether managers felt they were able to meet their responsibilities under the Pharmacy Act and regulations to ensure adequate staffing levels to meet the needs of their patients, as well as current pharmacy practice environment challenges (particularly HR capacity). The findings from the survey give further validation and weight to issues regarding HR recruitment and retention. Of note:

- While most pharmacy managers indicated that they were able to meet their responsibilities under the Pharmacy Act and regulations, nearly one quarter of respondents (24.3%) indicated that their pharmacy is always or often unable to provide a full scope of practice due to staffing levels with another 15.5% indicating that standards of practice always or often cannot be met due to inadequate staffing levels.

- Nearly half (45.6%) of respondents strongly agreed that staffing challenges at their pharmacy are contributing to employee burnout.
- Over half (68.0%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the quality of services provided at their pharmacy are impacted by staffing levels.
- Over one third (42.7%) of respondents indicated that patient safety is negatively impacted by staffing levels at their store.

Visual Summary of Findings

The cumulative findings from this work were then used to develop a visual summary of the current practice environment state. The visual summary provides a categorization of the factors into two major buckets: (1) practice site conditions and (2) human resource (HR) capacity.



The visual summary includes:

- the external contributors to the two primary categories of factors that are relevant but outside the NSCP's control or impact (blue boxes);

- a description of current state factors at play in community pharmacies that we heard throughout our data gathering stage;
- the resultant negative outcomes / risks relevant to the public interest (red boxes); and
- the relevant broader system factors that are constantly changing and that collectively create the context in which this challenge exists (yellow boxes).

On the whole, the visual summary reflects an imbalance between practice site conditions and HR capacity, wherein there currently there is insufficient staffing to meet current demands, which is ultimately leading to: (1) risks to patient safety, (2) burnout and job dissatisfaction, (3) unmet patient expectations, (4) unmet patient health needs, (5) reduced service quality and standard of care, and (6) reduced service offering.

The visual summary also identifies the levers that could be used by the NSCP to impact the factors (thereby improving the above outcomes), as well as the system context in which the NSCP and pharmacy is operating.

Strategic Planning Advisory Group

The Strategic Planning Advisory Group (SPAG) was convened in March 2022. Members of the NSCP SPAG included:

- NSCP Council: Lynn Corkum, Jon Wright
- NSCP EDI Advisory Committee: Tunde Awoyiga
- NSCP Senior Management/Staff: Bev Zwicker, Sue Sampson, Kate Wall, Andrea Bishop
- External Stakeholders/Consultants: Mike Davis (CEO, Davis Pier Consulting), Susan MacDougall (CEO, Windsor Elms), Sam Lanctin (Sam Lanctin Consultant), Tony Case (Case Associates)

The SPAG used a structured approach to assess the feasibility of the NSCP impacting the identified current state factors (see visual summary above) from the following perspectives:

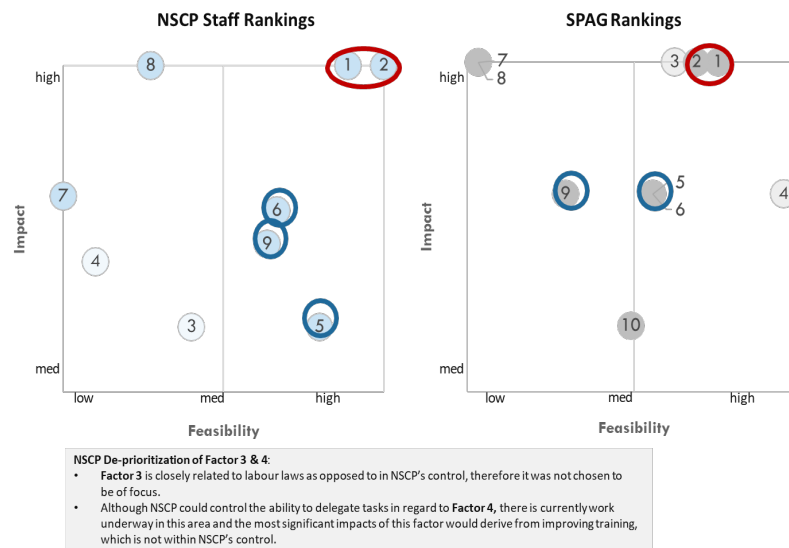
- Appropriateness: Ability of the NSCP to address factor given its legislative authority and its budget, with consideration to ongoing pharmacy business viability, and efficient use of regulatory power.
- Dependencies: Identification of other work (planned or underway) by key sector players that could influence the extent of impact the NSCP could have on specific factors.
- Alignment with Other Sectors: Lessons learned from similar challenges/factors addressed by other sectors/industries and insights on barriers/facilitators.
- Assumptions & Limitations: Identification of assumptions made that underpin the feasibility/impact assessments of each factor.
- Unintended Consequences: Potential unintended consequences if NSCP were to select a specific factor as an area of strategic focus moving forward.



The SPAG members' feasibility assessment was used to establish SPAG's ranking of the factors. A similar feasibility assessment and ranking process was also conducted with the NSCP staff. The findings from both the SPAG and NSCP staff processes were combined and provided to SPAG for feedback. Further

discussion about these factors took place, including a further exploration of the assumptions made in being able to address them and the potential unintended consequences, with SPAG ultimately recommending two factors that were considered to be both of high impact and high feasibility.

#	Factor
1	Staffing levels
2	Business model misalignment
3	Working long hours (e.g., 50+ hours weekly, high service volumes, operating hours)
4	Pharmacy team member skill gaps (e.g., undertrained, difficulty delegating tasks)
5	Lack of overlap and handover time, pharmacists working alone
6	Workflow centered on volume vs. quality (e.g., focus on verification & release; CCP vs. Rxing)
7	Frequent interruptions, distractions, and multi-tasking
8	Rushed task completion and/or limited time with patients
9	Lack of professional autonomy



Recommended Pharmacy Practice Environment Factor

The SPAG ultimately recommended two factors be brought forth to Council as part of its strategic prioritization work:

1. Staffing Levels and Mix: This factor refers to both number of staff (labour hours), as well as having the right staffing composition in pharmacies to meet patient care needs.
2. Business Model Misalignment: This factor refers to the misalignment between what businesses and pharmacy professionals deem the necessary amount of labour hours to adequately staff pharmacies. This challenge focuses on the disconnect between the staffing levels business owners deem necessary vs. what pharmacy managers/staff believe is required, ultimately limiting the hiring of more staff or increasing of labour hours and resulting in understaffed pharmacies.

Given the **inherent interconnectedness** of these two factors, the **current opportunities that can be leveraged** to impact these factors, and **current threats that can be mitigated**, it was recommended that an intersection of these two factors be the focus of the NSCP's strategic work.

"Staffing Levels Established by Business Workforce Models"

NSCP Prioritization of Workplace Environment Challenges



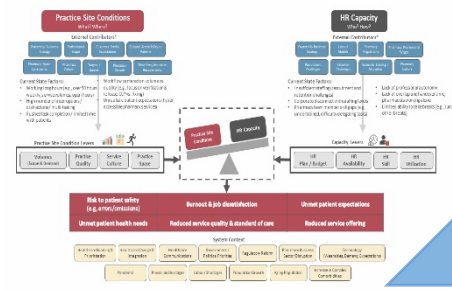
Nova Scotia
College of
Pharmacists

Governing the practice of pharmacy in Nova Scotia in the interest of the health and well being of the public

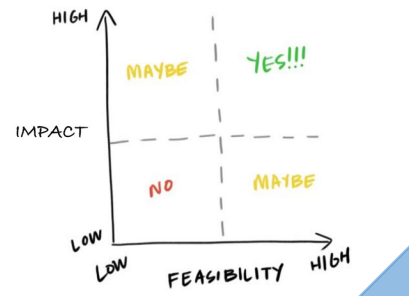
NSCP Work to Address Pharmacy Practice Environment Challenges

- Final User Review**
Suggested changes to improve pharmacy practice environment, including overall and negative feedback, shared by practitioners in real time and performance, changing service quality, and not shared efforts to meet sector's expectations, and health risks, and an increased risk for errors and omissions.
- Interviews with Pharmacy Practitioners**
Identified key themes in Pharmacy Practitioner Workload and for Pharmacy Services, 22 responses of Pharmacy Practitioners for a general survey, 10 personal Practice as Usual, 10 on Staffing Levels.
- Pharmacy Practitioner Validation Survey**
Established that pharmacy practitioners are busy and that staff current staff is not pharmacy practitioners, current challenges, and considerations are being to a substantial amount of care and fees to patient safety.
- Interviews with Sector Stakeholders**
Interviews generated concerns from stake assessment that from a significant challenge, raised working, and no capacity across knowledge of the importance of this work, and willingness to cooperate and collaborate.
- Pharmacy Manager Survey**
Identified a perceived barrier to staff, an unworkable practice environment, challenges and employees to meet, as well as negative impacts on the quality of services provided and patient safety.

2019-2022
Conduct background research



Feb 2022
Develop visual summary



Mar 2022
Undertake factor prioritization

"Staffing levels are not a detriment to the public receiving quality pharmacy care"

Apr 2022
Establish new strategic objective



June 2022 - 2023
Design and implement intervention(s)

NSCP Work to Address Pharmacy Practice Environment Challenges



Literature Review

Supported linkage between pharmacy practitioners feeling overwhelmed and negative outcomes related to: professional burnout and job dissatisfaction, diminishing service quality, reduced service offerings, unmet patient expectations and health needs, and an increased risk for errors and omissions.



Interviews with Pharmacy Practitioners

Identified five themes: (1) Pharmacy Practitioner Workloads/Demand for Pharmacy Services, (2) Accessibility of Pharmacy Professionals (i.e., on-demand services), (3) Scope of Practice, (4) Labour Models, (5) Staffing Levels



Pharmacy Practitioner Validation Survey

Established that pharmacy practitioners are burnt out and feel that current staffing levels/pharmacy practice environment challenges are unsustainable and leading to a reduced standard of care and risks to patient safety



Interviews with Sector Stakeholders

Established general consensus from those interviewed that there are significant challenges related workload and HR capacity and acknowledgment of the importance of this work and willingness to cooperate and collaborate.



Pharmacy Manager Survey

Identified a perceived link between current staffing issues/pharmacy practice environment challenges and employee burnout, as well as negative impacts on the quality of services provided and patient safety.



Literature Review

This research established the **linkage between professional burnout / job dissatisfaction** and how it can compound into negative system outcomes, such as an **increased risk to patient safety**.



Pharmacy Practitioner Interviews

Themes:

1. Pharmacy Practitioner Workloads / Demand for Pharmacy Services
2. Accessibility of Pharmacy Professionals (i.e., on-demand services)
3. Scope of Practice
4. Labour Models
5. Staffing Levels



Validation Survey

85% of survey participants indicated that their current **workload levels are unsustainable**

71% of survey participants indicated they felt their pharmacy's **staffing levels are inadequate** to meet patient demands for services

81% of survey participants indicated they **feel burnt out** because of their work

76% of survey participants indicated that **current pharmacy practice challenges** are resulting in a **reduced standard of care** at their pharmacy

75% of survey participants indicated that **current pharmacy practice challenges** are resulting in a **risk to patient safety** at their pharmacy

Key Sector Interviews

Highlights:

- There was general **consensus** from those interviewed that there are **significant challenges related workload and HR capacity**
- **Not all** participants **acknowledged** that these conditions are **impacting patient safety**.
- There was also **acknowledgment** of the **importance** of this **work** and **willingness** to cooperate and **collaborate** with the NSCP from many of those interviewed.



Pharmacy Manager Survey

24.3% indicated they are always or often **unable to provide a full scope of practice**

15.5% indicated that **standards of practice always or often cannot be met**

45.6% strongly agreed that staffing challenges at their pharmacy are **contributing to employee burnout**

68.0% strongly agreed or agreed that the **quality of services provided at their pharmacy are impacted**

42.7% indicated that **patient safety is negatively impacted**

Practice Site Conditions

What? Where?

External Contributors*



Current State:

- Interruptions / disruptions
- Workflow centered on prescription verification and release
- Decreased time with patients
- Multi-tasking
- Working long hours
- Having to say "no" to patients (even if service is in scope)
- Rushed patient interactions
- Owner focus on business need more than patient need
- Lack of role clarity
- Prioritization of services based on targets / quotas
- On-demand services (e.g., OTC consult)

HR Capacity

Who? How?

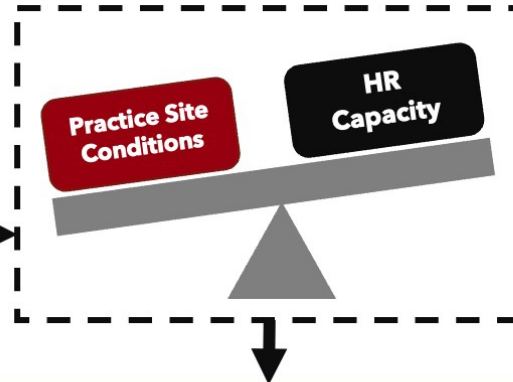
External Contributors*



Current State:

- Insufficient staff for service volume (dispensing & clinical services)
- Insufficient staff for administrative activities
- No overlap / handover time
- No lunches/breaks (rest/refresh)
- Limited vacation / sick leave
- Limited overtime funding
- Corporate disconnect with staffing needs
- Insufficient support staff
 - Under trained
 - Inability to delegate tasks
- Professional identity
 - Lack of role clarity
 - Underutilized skills
 - Confidence of pharmacy professionals (education/skills)

Practice Site Condition Levers

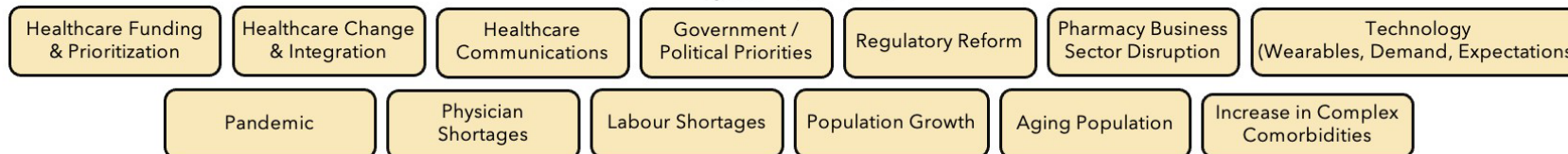


Capacity Levers



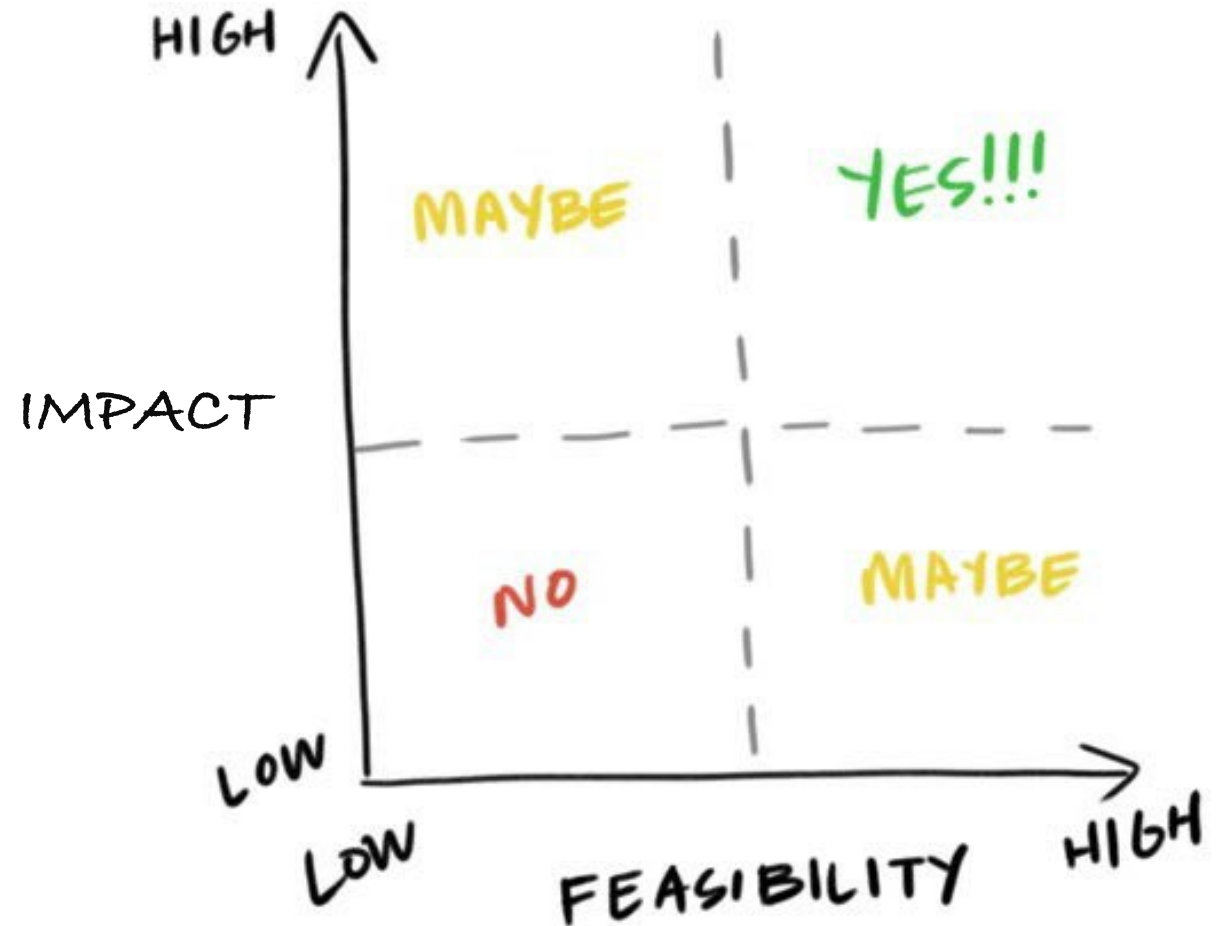
Risk to patient safety (e.g. errors/omissions)	Burnout & job dissatisfaction	Unmet patient expectations
Unmet patient health needs	Reduced service quality & standard of care	Reduced service offering

System Context



Prioritization Framework

- **Appropriateness:** Ability of the NSCP to address factor given its legislative authority and its budget, with consideration to ongoing pharmacy business viability, and efficient use of regulatory power.
- **Dependencies:** Identification of other work (planned or underway) by key sector players that could influence the extent of impact the NSCP could have on specific factors.
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- **Unintended Consequences:** Potential unintended consequences if NSCP were to select a specific factor as an area of strategic focus moving forward.



SPAG Recommended Factors for Strategic Focus:

1. Staffing Levels & Mix

- Includes factors: lack of overlap and handover time, pharmacists working alone

2. Business Model Misalignment

- Includes factors: workload centred on volume vs. quality, lack of professional autonomy



“Staffing Levels Established by Business Staffing Models”

Given the inherent interconnectedness of these two factors,
**it was recommended that Council focus its work on the intersection of
the two factors.**



Setting a Revised Objective

Current Objective (50,000 ft level)

“The pharmacy practice environment optimizes the quality of healthcare provided by pharmacy practitioners”

Recommended Objective (25,000 ft level)

"Staffing levels are not a detriment to the public receiving quality pharmacy care"

Next Steps



A short list of potential interventions will be developed based on identified barriers and multisectoral research



NSCP will engage a multistakeholder steering group to recommend intervention(s)



NSCP Council and staff will work to refine recommended intervention(s) and begin to design intervention components

Questions?

