

Shortage of government pharmacists causing delays in drug approval

St. John's — A shortage of government employed pharmacists is delaying the approval of drugs requiring special authorization under the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program (NLPDP) say the Liberal Opposition.

Some drugs require special authorization before the province will decide to pay for them under the plan.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones said it usually takes about 10 days for government pharmacists to review and grant approval or turn down the application.

But in a news release, Jones said the review process is currently taking up to five weeks because of a pharmacist shortage.

She said government has to raise salaries of its pharmacists to attract them away from the private sector where they can make between \$20,000 and \$30,000 more a year.

" This is a fairly significant difference and one that needs to be first acknowledged by government and then addressed in a direct manner," Jones said

According to Jones, job postings to fill the provincial pharmacy vacancies were issued more than a year ago and have yet to attract any applicants.

" This should be telling government officials that something is clearly not working and they need to step up their recruitment incentives," she said.

Jones said while people are waiting for approval for coverage, they can't wait to take their medication.

Health Minister Paul Oram was not available for an interview on Monday.