



[#VoteForHealth](#)

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Since 1867, the Canadian Medical Association has been the national voice of Canada's medical profession. We work with physicians, residents and medical students on issues that matter to the profession and the health of Canadians. We advocate for policy and programs that drive meaningful change for physicians and their patients.

A MESSAGE FROM CMA PRESIDENT DR. SANDY BUCHMAN



It is with a sense of urgency and a sense of purpose that I sound the alarm: health care in Canada is in crisis.

Physicians and their fellow health providers are frustrated that our patients are not getting the care and services they need – when and where they need them. We see first-hand how patients and their families are struggling to navigate a complex and under-resourced system. Too many Canadians are falling through the cracks; physicians and other health professionals are being stretched to the breaking point to make up for a crumbling system.

This year, the CMA consulted and listened to Canadians from coast to coast, through extensive public opinion research and in-person focus groups. What we heard is a wake-up call – and the CMA has responded with a strategic and sound policy platform and a commitment to speak out about these issues during the federal election campaign.

This policy document presents key recommendations for the policy platforms of all federal political parties. Our recommendations can then be part of their commitment to take decisive action and improve health care in Canada.

I encourage Canadians and all candidates to join the CMA this federal election in calling on political leaders – of all stripes – to put health back on the national agenda. The health of Canadians depends on it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Buchman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sandy Buchman, MD CCFP (PC) FCFP
CMA President



Learn more about
CMA's campaign,
including how you
can take action
in this election,
by visiting
cma.ca/election.

LISTENING TO CANADIANS

As the voice of Canada's physicians, the CMA listens closely to its members and the patients they serve. Their experience and knowledge help us identify the pressing issues affecting the medical profession, patients and communities across the country. This year, the CMA amplified these efforts. Through regional member forums, an extensive national poll and in-depth focus groups, we heard urgent concerns about the state of health care in Canada. Our findings confirm, without a doubt, that health care has been treated as a secondary issue by the Government of Canada for far too long.

Our consultations tell us that Canadians:

- Are worried about the shortage of health professionals, long wait times and crowded hospitals.
- Are growing tired of government cuts to health services to balance budgets.
- Believe that the federal government should do more to improve health care.
- Will vote for the federal party they think has the best plan for the future of health care.

We listened to physicians. These are physicians' top concerns:

- Lack of support for their patients' caregivers.
- Lack of access to care for their patients in rural and remote communities.
- Lack of appropriate care for vulnerable populations.
- Slow adoption of virtual care and emerging technologies.

We heard them. This is their call for action:

- Health care to be seen through a national lens.
- Leverage the potential of new and emerging technologies.
- More support for physician health and wellness.
- Attract and support more rural physicians.
- Decision-makers to adopt pharmacare and address drug shortages and pricing.
- Acknowledge climate change and the impact on Canadians' health.
- Work with Indigenous communities.
- Accelerate a national licensing program.

We listened to Canadians. These are their top concerns:

- Lack of support for caregivers.
- Lack of access to care for rural and remote communities.
- Concern for the health of vulnerable populations.

We heard them. This is what they want:

- Health care back on the national agenda.
- A health system they can count on in the long term.
- Federal political leadership and action; not hopeful and empty promises.
- A fully costed plan to improve health care.
- A federal pharmacare program.
- Increased funding to the provinces for seniors care.

Together with physicians and Canadians, we consolidated their experiences, concerns and calls for action into six key issues for each political party to consider.

ACCESS TO CARE • SENIORS CARE • VIRTUAL CARE • PHARMACARE
YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH • CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH



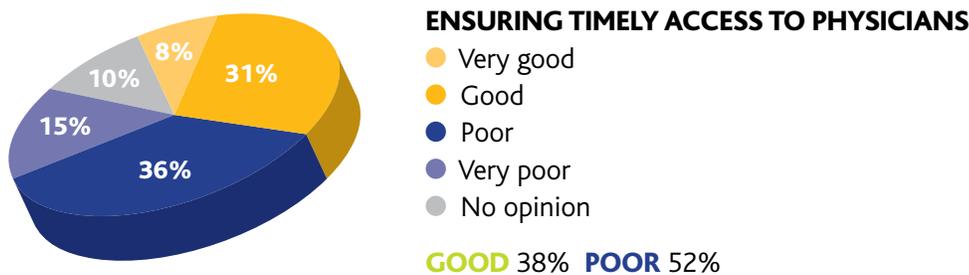
ACCESS TO CARE

Long wait times are strangling our nation’s health care system. It’s chronic. It’s nationwide. And it needs to change.

For vulnerable populations, accessing care is further complicated by social determinants – systemic social and economic conditions that influence a person’s health and access to care. Lower education levels, lower income, experiencing homelessness, cultural differences, gender inequities and regional factors are all examples of these barriers.

While waiting for care is a complex systemic issue, there are options that must be addressed around resource constraints.

The majority of Canadians are not impressed by the government’s performance in ensuring timely access to the care and medication the need.



Source: IPSOS

Canada’s resource-strapped health system is also harmful to the health and wellness of physicians.



What we know



Over 15% of Canadians aged 12 and older do not have a regular health care provider.



Far-ranging evidence indicates that access to care is not equitable in Canada, especially among vulnerable and at-risk populations as well as rural and remote communities.



Increasing demands on family physicians make working in primary care less attractive to new doctors.



Most medical students and residents accumulate severe debt loads, which influences decisions on practice and location.

The CMA calls on federal political parties to commit to:

- Creating a new \$1.2 billion Primary Health Care Transition Fund, which would focus on primary care, the backbone of our health care system.
- Investing in medical training positions and extending the Canada Student Loan forgiveness program to incentivize physicians to work in all under-serviced areas.
- Addressing inequities in access to appropriate care for patient populations that fall under federal jurisdiction (including members of the Canadian Forces, Indigenous Peoples, refugees, veterans, federal inmates) as well as vulnerable populations.



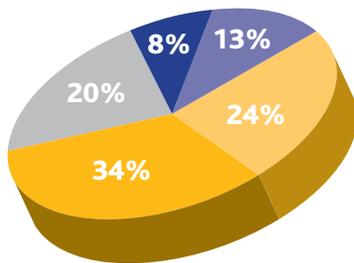
SENIORS CARE

Our health care system is failing older Canadians.

The reality is that the system was not originally designed to meet the needs of our aging population. The same is true for our funding mechanisms. Provinces and territories are not getting enough federal support to provide the range of health and social services that seniors and their families need.

Meanwhile, our population continues to age. Challenges being experienced by patients and their caregivers today will only intensify.

58% of Canadians believe they will need to delay retirement to afford health care

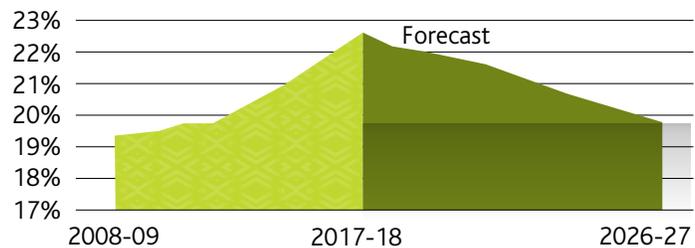


- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither
- Disagree
- Don't know

Without any new measures, the federal share of health spending – the Canada Health Transfer – will fall below 20% by 2026.

FEDERAL FUNDING COVERS APPROXIMATELY 22 PER CENT OF HEALTH CARE SPENDING

(CHT as percentage of total public health spending)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada

Current federal programs do not adequately support seniors and caregivers who face high out-of-pocket health expenses.

\$9.6 BILLION 2019

\$23.5 BILLION 2035

This group faces significant out-of-pocket expenses to pay for home and long-term care – expenses that will grow as the population ages.



INEQUITABLE

Low- or no-income individuals receive **little to no support**.



UNDERUTILIZED

Only **4.6%** of all caregivers receive money through federal tax credits.



INSUFFICIENT COVERAGE:

The credits will reimburse only 18% of expenses in 2019, dropping to 16% by 2035.

What we know



Provincial and territorial governments are struggling with rising health care costs as the population continues to age.



Patients face long wait times, spanning weeks, months and even years, for long-term care without adequate home care services.



Caregivers are at the core of providing care for seniors, but they do not receive adequate support.



Seniors and their caregivers are bearing increasing out-of-pocket health care expenses.



Addressing seniors care would result in better care and improve access to care for all Canadians.

The CMA calls on federal political parties to commit to:

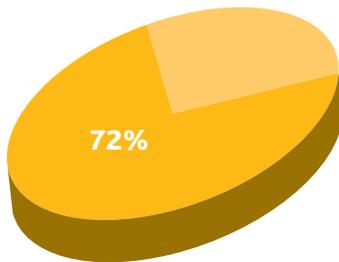
- Implementing a demographic top-up to the Canada Health Transfer based on the proportion of older persons in a province or territory. This would alleviate fiscal pressures, free up hospital beds, build better community care models, and ensure all seniors get the best care possible.
- Creating a Seniors Care Benefit program, which would directly support seniors and caregivers. Similar to the Child Care Benefit program, it would offset the high out-of-pocket health costs caregivers and patients face.



VIRTUAL CARE

Digital innovations have been widely adopted and improve many aspects of our daily lives. One exception is our publicly funded health care system – a model that has not significantly evolved in decades.

72% believe Canada has been slow to adopt virtual care, with no generational differences.



The CMA's leadership on virtual care

Recognizing the value to patients, the CMA has joined forces with the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and the College of Family Physicians of Canada as part of a new task force on enabling virtual care in Canada. This group is working to identify the regulatory and administrative changes needed to support virtual care in Canada, including how physicians can deliver care to patients.

A national physician license supports the expansion of virtual care

Physicians note that with a national license, they would likely:



“Doing this would support the principles of the Canada Health Act in terms of portability and accessibility. It would help to relieve physician undersupply in some provinces.”

Physician, CMA Member Voice e-Panel respondent

What we know



A digital divide exists in Canada. Some individuals, communities and population groups experience barriers to accessing online services, including virtual care.



Adoption of virtual care has been slow due to regulatory and privacy issues.



Digital health, including virtual care, offers the potential to promote patient and population health, but red tape is blocking its delivery across provincial and territorial boundaries.

The CMA calls on federal political parties to commit to:

- Establishing a national Digital Health Literacy Secretariat to address the country's health digital divide.
- Increasing funding to assist the connectivity and interoperability of virtual care, ultimately enhancing communication between patients, their physicians and health facilities.
- Investing in establishing a national license to enable physicians to deliver patient care through technology everywhere in Canada.



PHARMACARE

Canada is the only country with universal health care that does not include coverage for prescription medication. As a result, Canadians face inequitable access to necessary medication; this inequity is acute amongst vulnerable populations.

Canada's physicians continue to highlight the serious consequences of ongoing drug shortages on patient care. While moving to a national pharmacare plan, the government must take additional action to manage and resolve the current and emerging shortages in pharmaceutical medication.

Further, the CMA has significant concerns about recent U.S. measures, that if unchecked, will intensify drug shortages by overburdening Canada's domestic supply of medication.



7 in 10

physicians frequently ask patients about drug coverage, indicating coverage is a barrier for many people.



46%

of physicians say patients without drug coverage do not fill prescriptions.



\$6.5 billion

is how much Canadian households spent out of pocket on prescription drugs in 2014.



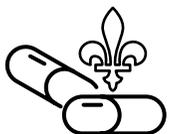
16%

of total health care expenditures in Canada are drug-related.

What we know



Prescription medications play a critical role in maintaining a high-quality, cost-effective health care system.



In Canada, only Quebec has a universal program for prescription medications.



The high cost of prescription drugs can cause Canadians to skip doses or avoid having prescriptions filled.



A universal, federally funded prescription drug plan would ensure all Canadians have access to the medically necessary prescription drugs they need, regardless of their ability to pay.

The CMA calls on federal political parties to commit to:

- Implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare.
- Taking immediate measures to prevent and resolve drug shortages, including protecting the Canadian supply of necessary medicines.



YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Timely access to mental health care services for youth is needed to save lives.

Despite growing recognition and awareness around mental illness, Canadians lack timely access to appropriate mental health and substance use services for children and youth. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, an estimated 1.2 million children and youth are affected by mental illness, while less than one in five receive appropriate treatment.

What we know



Emergency department visits and inpatient hospitalizations for mental health issues among children and youth are rising across Canada.



Wait times are lengthy to access appropriate treatment, especially publicly funded options.



The stigma around mental health continues.

“With mental health, it seems to be approached differently and people keep falling through the cracks. I had a friend with severe mental health problems. It was awful and really stressful on the entire family. If she’d had a physical problem, it would have been dealt with.”

Focus group participant,
the CMA's *Listening to
Canadians* opinion research

The CMA calls on federal political parties to commit to:

- Demonstrating national leadership and long-term funding for integrated mental health services for youth.



CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH

Climate change is emerging as a significant threat to public health, not only in Canada but around the globe. The health impacts of climate change facing Canadians are real and will worsen.

"This is the public health imperative of our time."

Dr. Gigi Osler, CMA Past President

What we know



Canada's doctors see the devastating health impacts of a changing climate first-hand. From wildfires to heat waves to new infectious diseases, we're already treating the health effects of climate change.



Climate change is affecting the mental and physical health of Canadians, with little awareness of the increasing impacts.



Physicians have a role to play as trusted communicators and providers of care and can make the link between the climate crisis and the consequences on our health.

The CMA calls on federal political parties to commit to:

- Investing in adapting our health system and public health capacity to address the growing health impacts of climate change in Canada.
- Implementing a comprehensive plan so that Canada meets our international climate change targets.

Canada's health care system has long been a source of national pride. For decades, Canadians took great comfort in knowing they could expect high-quality health care, when and where they needed it.

Today, sadly, the reality no longer lives up to the promise.

Too many Canadians don't have access to a family doctor. Wait times for procedures can be unacceptably long. Our seniors languish in hospital beds. Our youth can't access mental health services. People can't afford their medication.

Canadians are worried that our health care system won't be there for them when they need it most.

With these policy recommendations, the Canadian Medical Association provides a realistic prescription to put Canada's health care system back on course and able to meet the needs of the 21st century. Join us in reinvigorating our health care system through improvements to access to care; seniors care; virtual care; pharmacare; youth mental health; and helping Canadians understand the link between climate change and health.

In the interest of all Canadians, the physicians of Canada call on you, the federal candidate, to stand up for your neighbours and constituents. Now is the time for national leadership. Now is the time to put health back on the agenda.

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September 12, 2019