

Q&A session – CMA Annual General Meeting 2020

During the Canadian Medical Association's 153rd Annual General Meeting on Aug. 23, 45 minutes were set aside for member questions. Here are some of the top issues raised:

Personal protective equipment

What is the CMA doing to ensure physicians are safe and protected, and can the CMA purchase personal protective equipment on behalf of its members?

Since the start of the pandemic, the CMA has been advocating strongly for a reliable, secure supply of personal protective equipment (PPE). CMA President Dr. Sandy Buchman has met with the federal health minister and other MPs and has appeared before several parliamentary committees to highlight how a lack of PPE threatens physician health and the health of Canadians. The CMA continues to press the federal government to exercise its global purchasing power and to maximize its distribution channels so physicians and other health care workers have reliable access to PPE.

- The CMA has surveyed members three times since March to get an accurate assessment of the availability of PPE and has provided this information to the federal government to identify and respond to need.
- The CMA provided \$2.5 million to the provincial and territorial medical associations (PTMAs) to help provide COVID-19 related supports to physicians on the ground. Through Scotiabank and MD Financial Management, the CMA also supported the allocation of \$4.6 million to support additional pandemic relief efforts.
- The CMA's subsidiary, Joule, has also awarded a COVID-19 Innovation grant to Dr. Neil Naik and PPE Access Canada, a non-profit group providing reliable and affordable access to PPE for front-line health care workers, non-profit/charitable organizations and regional agencies.
- The CMA Foundation contributed \$5 million to the Frontline Fund to ensure front-line health care workers can access the resources they need. They also set up a \$5 million fund to support front-line health care workers in community hospitals. These funds are available for supplies, such as PPE, ventilators and testing equipment.

Virtual care and national licensure

How is the CMA supporting physicians who want to offer more virtual care services and ensuring a coordinated approach across Canada?

Scaling up virtual care is a priority issue for the CMA, as an important tool in helping Canadians access care.

In March 2019, the CMA collaborated with the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (Royal College) and the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) to create the Virtual Care Task Force. In February 2020, this group published 19 key recommendations on the national standards, legislation and policy that must be implemented to pave the way for virtual care in Canada.

After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CMA, the Royal College and the CFPC partnered to develop a series of how-to guides, videos and other resources to help physicians and patients adopt virtual care. The CMA continues to advocate for national fee codes for virtual care services, and it recently helped fund Atlantic PTMAs to develop a proposal to establish joint fee codes for virtual care.

Physician health and wellness

What is the CMA doing to help mitigate physician burnout and protect physicians' psychological safety?

The CMA has created a dedicated physician wellness and medical culture team, headed by Executive Vice-president Dr. Caroline Gérin-Lajoie. At the beginning of the pandemic, the CMA published a series of wellness tip sheets and resources to support physician resiliency and well-being. CMA subsidiary Joule offered regular webinars to help physicians cope with everything from grief to addiction and offered workshops on mindfulness.

The CMA also launched several new services to support physician health and wellness:

- The Wellness Support Line provides physicians, medical learners and their immediate families 24/7 access to counselling and mental health supports.
- The Wellness Connection is a virtual space for physicians and medical learners to take part in virtual group support sessions, led by trained facilitators, on a range of wellness topics.
- The Wellness Hub is a national, online collection of nearly 300 health and wellness resources targeted to physicians, residents and medical students seeking data, guidance and wellness help.

Equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism

How is the CMA ensuring diversity in its leadership, and what work is the CMA doing to examine racism and discrimination within the medical profession?

In 2020, the CMA launched a new policy to support equity and diversity at all levels in the medical system and issued a statement on anti-racism that now forms part of CMA policy. The CMA is also establishing a Health Equity Framework to review all its work through an equity lens.

The CMA Foundation provided a donation to support the development of a simulation-based tool, Stand Up for Indigenous Health, to teach health care providers about the determinants of Indigenous health. Together with the Saskatchewan Medical Association, the CMA is sponsoring a three-year pilot to fund a course for fourth-year medical students on the role of the practitioner in Indigenous wellness.

With the goal of fostering much-needed dialogue on the experiences of Indigenous patients within the health care system, the CMA is providing financial support for the development of an Indigenous health care film series, scheduled to launch later this fall.

The CMA recognizes that multi-stakeholder support is critical and is committed to working with Indigenous physicians and other key collaborators to address issues of systemic racism and structural inequity within medicine.

CMA in Quebec

Why was the Québec Medical Association dissolved, and how is the CMA supporting physicians in Quebec?

QMA members voted to legally dissolve the Québec Medical Association. The CMA will open an office in Montréal and is in the process of hiring a director-general to lead all of its work in the province. The CMA welcomes the opportunity to foster an even stronger relationship with physicians in Quebec and to collaborate with key stakeholders. The CMA is currently striking an advisory group to foster engagement and provide insights to help ground its work and build strong connections.

In addition:

- The CMA Foundation has donated \$1 million to the four medical faculties in Quebec to support medical learners and \$2 million to nine municipalities as part of its community COVID-19 relief effort.
- Through the CMA's advocacy work, CMA representatives have met with government officials on major issues of concern to Quebec physicians, including seniors care.
- In response to member feedback, Joule will be launching a French edition of *CMAJ* starting in 2021, while continuing to offer its Physician Leadership Institute program in French.

Supporting Alberta members

How is the CMA supporting the Alberta Medical Association in its negotiations with the provincial government?

The CMA shares the concerns of Alberta physicians and has been taking the following actions, in coordination with the Alberta Medical Association (AMA):

- publicly denouncing the actions of the provincial government and supporting the AMA's call for a fair negotiations process;
- raising concerns about the breakdown in negotiations with the federal health minister, both one on one and as part of the joint meeting held recently with the presidents of the PTMAs;
- doubling the initial \$2 million of support to the AMA, committing \$4 million toward their legal, research and advocacy efforts; and
- most recently, writing an open letter of support to Alberta physicians and asking physicians and members of the public to send a copy to the Alberta government as part of a new letter writing campaign.

The CMA continues to work with all the PTMAs on more ways to lend support.

Access to care

What does the CMA see as priorities for improving mental health care in Canada?

During the 2019 federal election, the CMA championed access to care as a key pillar of its advocacy campaign.

Access to mental health services remains an important issue, and the new CMA president, Dr. Ann Collins, shared her concerns about the growing need for these services in her inaugural address to members at the AGM.

To help mitigate some of the gaps in services, the CMA Foundation has contributed \$10 million to cities and communities to help individuals experiencing mental health and substance use, homelessness and food insecurity challenges, and \$250,000 for youth mental health support through Jack.org.

Moving forward, the CMA will continue to call on governments to improve access to care for all Canadians, including mental health care supports.

CMA strategic direction

How is the CMA ensuring it remains relevant to its members, to continue having an impact on the national level?

Physicians recognize the importance of a national voice that will address the major issues affecting the profession, health and health care, and we're pleased to have 78,000 physicians and medical learners as members of the CMA.

Now in the final year of its existing strategic plan (CMA 2020), the CMA is engaging members and stakeholders in comprehensive discussions as it prepares its next strategy, Impact 2040. The CMA looks forward to working with its membership to drive change and have a substantive impact — for the medical community, patients and all Canadians.

The CMA will continue to lend its perspective to the national discussion on health and will continue to demonstrate its value as it works on behalf of the profession. The association is committed to listening to, and working with, physicians and medical learners in all jurisdictions in Canada.

The CMA will also continue to engage with members through various means, including its regional member forums, its AGM, surveys, website and its community engagement platform — to hear your ideas and benefit from your knowledge and experience.