



For immediate release

Ottawa should step in to cut medical wait times, Canadians say

Ottawa (Sept. 23, 2014) — Eight out of 10 Canadians (82.4%) believe the federal government should play a leading role in working to reduce medical wait times across the country, a new [Nanos poll](#) says.

Commissioned by the Wait Time Alliance (WTA), a coalition of 18 medical professional organizations, and released today, the Nanos poll shows Canadians are overwhelmingly concerned about all aspects of the wait time issue, regardless of age.

Nine in 10 (92.2%) believed Canadians should have access to the same level of health care regardless of where they live in Canada. Almost nine in 10 (87.8%) say that patients are waiting too long in hospital beds for placement in long-term care. Nine in 10 (91.7%) indicated Canadians' health conditions are deteriorating while waiting for health care services. A similar number (94.0%) said patients are waiting too long to see specialists.

The poll was conducted with 1,000 Canadians Sept. 13-16 by telephone (land line and cell) and online with a margin of error of 3.1 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

"Health professionals have known for a long time that wait times are a national crisis, not a provincial irritant," said Dr. Chris Simpson, WTA. "Now it is clear their patients across the country share the same view. Beyond the provinces, the federal government must be part of the solution."

Many medical specialists believe now is the time for Ottawa to step up.

"If I were to ask the federal government to do one thing to help solve this problem, (it) is get interested in it. This is a national problem," said Geoff Blair of the Canadian Association of Paediatric Surgeons.

Dr. Frank Molnar, Medical Director of the Regional Geriatric Program of Eastern Ontario, said long wait times can be attributed to the fact that elderly patients, particularly those suffering from dementia, are lying in urgently-needed acute care hospital beds because Canada has not invested in long-term care infrastructure or home care programs.

"What we need right now is a national seniors care strategy — a strategy that is consistent in all of the provinces," Dr. Molnar said.

"I think we're looking to the federal government to step up and advocate for all citizens of Canada," said Dawn Richards, a WTA patient advisor.

Although wait time reduction was a priority in the just-expired 2004 Health Accord between Ottawa, the provinces and the territories, the WTA has concluded progress in the past decade has been only marginal.

NOTE TO EDITORS: VIDEOS OF THE ABOVE INTERVIEWS ARE EMBEDDED IN THIS NEWS RELEASE. [CLICK HERE TO ACCESS VIDEOS.](#)

In a [brief](#) also released today, the WTA renewed calls for a national seniors strategy that includes dementia, standardized countrywide wait time data and more federal money for health care and community care resources ([see Timely access to care for all Canadians: The role of the federal government](#)).

Canadians' timely access to necessary medical care depends on where they live, the WTA brief said. For example, 90 per cent of patients in Newfoundland and Labrador received hip replacements within six months, compared to only 37 per cent of patients in Nova Scotia.

"Wait times in Canada still remain significantly higher than in most leading industrialized countries," the brief said. "When all of the wait periods in a typical patient's health care journey are considered together, an even more striking picture of delayed care emerges."

The Wait Time Alliance (WTA) is a partnership comprised of the Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology, the Canadian Association of General Surgeons, the Canadian Association of Nuclear Medicine, the Canadian Association of Paediatric Surgeons, the Canadian Association of Radiation Oncology, the Canadian Association of Radiologists, the Canadian Cardiovascular Society, the Canadian Geriatrics Society, the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Ophthalmological Society, the Canadian Orthopaedic Association, the Canadian Psychiatric Association, the Canadian Rheumatology Association, the Canadian Society of Plastic Surgeons, the College of Family Physicians of Canada, and the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada and a Patient Advisor.

- 30 -

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