



NATIONAL

A HEALTHCARE SYSTEM IN CRISIS

– WHAT'S THE PROBLEM, AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO SOLVE IT?



Canada's healthcare system is on life support – and it needs emergency treatment.

Consider these facts. Around six million Canadian adults – one in five – don't have a family doctor. That means they face **piecemeal**, inconsistent treatment. Sometimes they can't even get the prescriptions they need.

What's more, without their own physicians, people often have no choice but to seek care in hospital emergency rooms (ER). That's putting extra pressure on already overloaded ERs. Many are breaking under the strain. In some cases, emergency room patients have had to wait as long as four days to see a doctor or to be admitted for treatment.

PUSHED TO THE LIMIT

Not surprisingly, hard-pressed hospital staff are burning out.

The COVID-19 pandemic that is still ongoing is partly to blame. At the peak of the crisis, many healthcare workers were working double and triple shifts. As a result, some are now cutting their hours or leaving the profession entirely. A 2021 survey proves the point. It found that 60 percent of new nurses are already considering leaving their current job.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2021, there were almost 94,000 physicians and 459,000 nurses in Canada.

Some ER departments have at times had to close because they are so short-staffed. The problem is particularly bad in small towns and rural communities.

Another sign that the system is failing? It takes, on average, about 12 weeks for a patient to see a specialist after being

referred by a family doctor. That's nearly three times longer than it took in 1993.

WORKER SHORTAGE

The problems with our medical system will multiply if we don't fix them. The number of job vacancies for healthcare positions was at a record high in 2022. Experts estimate that our country will be short nearly 44,000 doctors and 117,600 nurses by 2030. Meanwhile, Canada's population is expected to grow by close to eight percent.

WHY THE MESS?

Many factors are playing a role in the healthcare crisis.

For one thing, the nation's 17 medical schools aren't turning out enough doctors. They accept just 3000 students a year. And even if they did take in more students, there wouldn't be enough **residency** positions for

DEFINITIONS

PIECEMEAL: done or happening gradually at different times and often in different ways

RESIDENCY: the position of a physician receiving special training in a hospital (usually after completing an internship)



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new doctors. Yet physicians must complete a residency before they can set up a practice. The vast majority of people who graduate from foreign medical schools but want to practice in Canada can't get residency positions even now.

Another issue: Each province and territory is responsible for licensing doctors. So physicians who want to move to another region must be re-licensed before they can work. That stops many from relocating to places that badly need them.

Canada's population has aged, too, and seniors typically need more medical care. Yet to save money, some regions have closed hospitals or cut their budgets.

AND IS THERE A CURE?

More money could help. The federal government splits healthcare costs with the provinces and the territories. The premiers want Ottawa to increase its share from 22 to 35 percent. Federal Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos has hinted that an increase could come soon, but with conditions.

Ottawa wants the premiers to commit to ending long wait

ABOUT MEDICARE

Canada has a **universal**, publicly-funded healthcare system. Known as Medicare, this system was created by laws passed in 1957 and 1966. In 1984, they were replaced by the Canada Health Act.

Under Medicare, the health care of all citizens and permanent residents is paid for mainly by the 13 provinces and territories. Each has its own insurance plan. Each gets cash from the federal government on a **per-capita** basis to help cover the costs. Not all services are covered, however. People pay for vision care and medications, for example, although some provinces and territories partially cover certain groups. As well, about two-thirds of Canadians have some form of private health insurance to help pay for these expenses.

In 2022, Canada spent \$331 billion, or 12.2 percent of its **GDP**, on health care – about \$8653 per person. That's about 70 percent of the total cost of health care in the country.

times. It wants them to hire more healthcare workers. It says there must be a better system of care for seniors. It wants to see more resources for treating mental health and substance abuse. It also wants all health data digitized and virtual care easier to get.

Dr. Alika Lafontaine, head of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), proposes creating a national physician license, too. That way, doctors could move easily. The system could also verify the **credentials** of foreign doctors who want practice here.

Expanding team-based care so more people can see family doctors faster, would help, too. So would a nationwide plan for rebuilding our healthcare workforce. And better data collection could track and address service gaps. As well, creating new education openings would produce more physicians, nurses, and **nurse practitioners**.

“Canadians are really worried, frustrated and frightened about the state of the healthcare system,” Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland admitted. “We know that we need to work together to make it better.” ★

DEFINITIONS

CREDENTIALS: documents that prove who you are or that show your qualifications or status

GDP: Gross Domestic Product – the value of all goods and services produced and sold in a specific time period in a country

NURSE PRACTITIONERS: registered nurses who have additional education and nursing experience which enables them to diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, prescribe medications, and perform medical procedures

PER CAPITA: for each person

UNIVERSAL: involving all the members of a group or society



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Canada's universal, publicly-funded healthcare system is known as:

2. Describe how Canada's healthcare system works.

3. What types of services are not covered under this system? How are these services paid for?

4. How much money did governments spend to provide health care to Canadians in 2022?

5. How much does Ottawa contribute to provincial healthcare costs?

6. How many adult Canadians do not have a regular family doctor?

7. How is this doctor shortage affecting health care for many Canadians? Explain.

8. List at least two examples of how the healthcare system is currently under stress.

9. List at least three other reasons why Canada's healthcare system is experiencing big problems.



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QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. The article states that "*some ER departments have been forced to close down altogether at times because they are short-staffed. The problem is particularly bad in small towns and rural communities.*" As you see it, what kinds of incentives or policies could be put in place to draw more medical professionals to small towns and rural communities? Explain.

2. Canada has a universal healthcare system funded through taxes. This means that any Canadian citizen or permanent resident can apply for public health insurance. Some medical professionals in Canada have suggested that health care move to a two-tiered system. This would mean that patients could have access to both publicly-funded care, paid through taxes by the government, and privately-funded care, paid by patients who could afford to do so.

As you see it, what might be the pros and cons of offering a two-tiered healthcare system in Canada, for patients, medical professionals, and the government? Give examples to support your ideas.



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QUESTIONS FOR ONLINE EXPLORATION

Note: The links below are listed at www.lesplan.com/links for easy access.

1. Learn more about some of the current issues related to Canada's healthcare system:

a) Patient Care

Children: <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2139872323835> [5:58]

Elderly: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/gladys-sibley-longterm-care-seniors-1.6567741>

Wait times: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/marketplace/the-waiting-game-investigating-canada-s-healthcare-system-1.6620583> [22:33]

b) Doctors: <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2042954307809> [7:18]

c) Hospitals: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/red-cross-helping-at-cheo-1.6675906>

What did you learn?

2. Experts say that Canada's healthcare system has had some cracks for years that will take more than money to fix. Find out more about what they have to say:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/healthcare-crisis-doctors-hospitals-rethink-1.6695642>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/health-care-how-we-got-here-fix-broken-cracks-billions-canadian-duclos-1.6691196>

What cracks do they identify in our healthcare system?



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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

A. Write the letter that corresponds to the best answer on the line beside each question:

_____ 1. **How much did governments spend on health care in 2022?**

- a) \$860 million
- b) \$42 billion
- c) \$331 billion
- d) \$728 billion

_____ 2. **Which services are not covered under Canada's Medicare system?**

- a) specialist referrals
- b) emergency room visits
- c) family doctor visits
- d) vision care and prescriptions

_____ 3. **Provincial and territorial premiers want the federal government to:**

- a) transfer more patients to the U.S.
- b) accept more foreign-trained doctors
- c) increase healthcare funding
- d) open more spaces at Canada's medical schools

B. Mark the statements T (True) or F (False). If a statement is True, write one important fact to support it on the line below. If a statement is False, write the words that make it true on the line below.

_____ 4. **True or False?** Most adult Canadians have a family doctor.

_____ 5. **True or False?** In Canada, the federal government is partly responsible for health care.

_____ 6. **True or False?** Canadian medical schools accept 5500 students each year.

C. Fill in the blanks to complete each sentence.

7. Canada's universal publicly-funded healthcare system is commonly called _____.

8. To practice in Canada, doctors must complete a _____ requirement after their university training.

9. Some hospital _____ departments have closed due to a shortage of health care workers.

D. Respond to the following question in paragraph form. *(Use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.)*

10. What is your understanding of the reasons for the current crisis in health care in Canada? Explain.
