



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Wait times improving since accord, but Canada can do much better, says Wait Time Alliance

Ottawa (June 3, 2014) — Medical wait times in Canada have improved since the signing of the 2004 Health Accord, but progress has been uneven, the Wait Time Alliance (WTA) said in its 2014 Report Card today.

In fact, with the Accord now dead, Canada should try emulating Scotland, where medical wait times are effectively a thing of the past, the WTA added in its annual assessment of wait times for treatment and diagnosis across Canada.

The WTA Report Card singled out Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and Saskatchewan as provinces that have made or are beginning to make “substantive and sustained progress” in reducing wait times. But other provinces continue to struggle to make any sustained improvements.

Also of concern, the WTA said, is the significant variation in wait times within provinces and even within communities. “How long you wait for treatment has a lot to do with your postal code,” said Dr. Chris Simpson, WTA Chair.

Video for media use:

Dr. Chris Simpson, Chair of the WTA, has recorded answers to five questions on the 2014 Report Card. These high definition videos are available for download at:
www.skyflyproductions.com/WTA-ATA

By contrast, wait times in Scotland have been virtually eliminated. Scotland has a patients’ charter of rights and responsibilities that includes wait time guarantees. The WTA urges governments in Canada to implement a charter on rights and responsibilities with targets and enforcement of maximum wait time guarantees.

“Imagine a land where . . . 90% of patients are seen within four hours in the emergency department,” the WTA noted. “This land already exists — Scotland.”

It is simply not right to force Canadians to wait two to three times longer for necessary medical care than citizens of other countries, according to the WTA, a coalition of 18 physician groups, including the Canadian Medical Association (CMA).

“Excessive wait times are not the price Canadians must pay for universal health care, despite what some would have us believe,” said Dr. Simpson, who is also president-elect of the CMA. “Long wait times are a symptom of poor systemic performance or poor coordination between systems.”

According to Dr. Simpson, a lack of safe and affordable housing for seniors will spill over into a shortage of acute care hospital beds. In other words the system will back up the same way an airport does. “Let’s be very clear here, this is not a case of just throwing new money at an old problem. It is a matter of new thinking and accountable performance,” Dr. Simpson concluded.

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.

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