



ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE



THE ISSUE

Wait times for health care, including diagnostic and surgical procedures in Ontario were a serious issue affecting Ontarians' health and wellbeing long before the pandemic.

The pandemic has compounded this problem, and the situation is increasingly urgent. The Ontario Medical Association estimates the pandemic caused delays of 21 million patient care services, including one million surgeries.

In addition, the most conservative estimates indicate that one million Ontarians are now without a family doctor. That number may be higher as many Ontarians have given up on trying to find a family doctor. Ontario's Medical Association also estimates that Ontarians will wait up to 31 months for a knee surgery, or up to 25 months for hip replacements and cataract surgeries. And, just last fall, a funding dispute meant older Ontarians could not access OHIP-insured routine eye care.

Wait times have also increased because Ontario has cut 20,000 hospital beds in the past 30 years. Plus, hospitals operate at 100%, or above capacity, because so many patients are waiting for alternate levels of care, such as long-term care, but have nowhere else to go. It has been estimated that Ontario needs another 8,793 beds – and additional health human resources needed to care for the patients in those beds – to meet average levels in other provinces.

In 2021, the Ontario government introduced measures to provide some surgical and diagnostic procedures in independent health facilities, to try and reduce backlogs for vision surgeries and other procedures. Critics have said this is a direct move toward private, for-profit health care – and it does nothing to increase public health care capacity for Ontarians.

Wait times are a serious barrier to older adult health and wellbeing, and Ontario's next government must have a plan to address them while building capacity in our public health care system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ontario needs funding to meet the needs of older adults, including vision care, health human resource planning, and the immediate need to address backlogged surgeries and other procedures.

Ontario's next government must:

- Increase accountability and better serve Ontarians' interests when it comes to wait times and access to health care services like surgeries and diagnostic procedures – and that means a plan to reduce wait times, and transparent reporting on progress to identify and address the worst problems.
- Build health care human resources capacity to ensure every Ontarian has access to the right kind of health care, in the right place, at the right time – including personal support workers, doctors and specialists, nurses and nurse practitioners, and other health-care professionals.
- Implement a comprehensive provincial seniors' strategy that improves and expands home and community-based health care delivery as part of our health care system.



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CONNECTING WITH CANDIDATES AND CAMPAIGNS

You never know when you will get a chance to ask candidates or their campaigners about their positions on the issues most important to older adults in Ontario. Keep this backgrounder handy for quick facts and use these questions when connecting with candidates and campaigns.

These questions are great conversation-starters. Remember, you can always ask follow-up questions to get to the “why” or “why not” of a candidate’s response.

- What new health care funding is your party committing to in order to address surgical and diagnostic procedure backlogs, and build capacity in Ontario’s public health care system?
- How will your party ensure older adults in Ontario can access OHIP-insured health care services without interruption, like vision care?
- What is your party’s plan to ensure every Ontarian has access to the right kind of health care provider, at the right time?
- How and when will your party improve and expand home and community-based health care delivery as part of Ontario’s public health care system?

