



NEWS RELEASE

Canada one of highest spenders among universal health-care countries, but ranks near bottom on number of doctors and wait times

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For immediate release

VANCOUVER—Despite spending more on health care than almost every other comparable country with universal health care, Canada ranks near the bottom in the number of physicians and acute care beds—and suffers from the longest wait times, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

“Canadians pay a lot for their universal health-care system, but compared to other countries with universal health care, our system performs poorly on a number of key measures,” said Bacchus Barua, associate director of health policy studies at the Fraser Institute and co-author of *Comparing Performance of Universal Health Care Countries, 2017*.

The study compares 29 universal health-care systems in developed countries, spotlighting several key areas including cost, availability and use of resources, access to care and treatment, clinical performance and quality, and the health status of patients.

In 2015, the most recent year of comparable data, Canada’s health-care spending as a share of GDP (10.6 per cent) ranked third highest—after adjusting for age—behind only Switzerland and France.

But despite the high cost, Canada ranks poorly on a number of important indicators.

For example, Canada ranks 25 out of 29 countries for number of physicians (2.7 per 1,000 people). And last for the number of acute care beds—2.1 per 1,000 people.

And when it comes to critical technologies, Canada ranks 20 out of 27 for the number of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines with 9.8 MRI scanners per million people.

As for wait times, among the 10 comparable countries with universal health care for which data is available, Canada performed the worst with the highest percentage of patients (30 per cent) who waited two months or longer for a specialist appointment, and the highest percentage of patients (18 per cent) who waited four months or longer for elective surgery.

Germany performed best on both indicators, with no patients reporting having had to wait more than four months for elective surgery.

“Despite Canada’s high health-care spending, we continue to struggle with long wait times, which remain a defining characteristic,” Barua said.

“To improve Canada’s health-care system, policymakers should learn from other successful universal health-care countries, for the benefit of Canadians and their families.”

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