

NEWS RELEASE



Of 28 countries with universal health care, Canada among highest spenders, but ranks near the bottom for number of doctors, hospital beds, MRIs and has the longest wait times

Nov. 04, 2021

For immediate release

VANCOUVER—Despite spending more on health care than most other developed countries with universal coverage, Canada has some of the lowest numbers of doctors, hospital beds, and medical technologies—and the longest wait times, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

“There is a clear imbalance between the high cost of Canada’s health-care system and the value Canadians receive in terms of availability of resources and timely access to care” said Bacchus Barua, Director of health policy studies at the Fraser Institute and co-author of *Comparing Performance of Universal Health Care Countries, 2021*.

The study compares 28 universal health-care systems in developed countries, spotlighting several key areas including cost, availability and use of resources, access to care, clinical performance and quality, and the health of Canadians.

In 2019, the latest year of comparable data, Canada’s health-care spending as a share of GDP (11.3 per cent) ranked second highest (after adjusting for population age) behind only Switzerland.

But despite Canada’s high level of spending, availability and access to medical resources is generally worse than in comparable countries (its performance in terms of utilization and quality is mixed).

For example, (out of 28 countries) Canada ranks 26th for the number of doctors (2.8 per 1,000 people), 25th (out of 26 countries) for the number of hospital beds (2.0 per 1,000 people), and 24th (out of 28 countries) for the number of psychiatric beds (0.37 per 1,000 people).

Canada ranks 21st (out of 24) for the number of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines with 10.5 MRIs per million people, and 22nd (out of 26) for CT scanners with 15.2 scanners per million people.

Crucially, among the 10 comparable universal health-care countries that measure wait times, Canada ranks last with the lowest percentage (38 per cent) of patients who waited four weeks or less to see a specialist, and the lowest percentage of patients (62 per cent) who waited four months or less for elective surgery.

“Canada’s relative lack of critical resources and struggle with long wait times for treatment precede the COVID-19 pandemic” said Mackenzie Moir, Policy Analyst and co-author of the report.

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

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