



# NEWS RELEASE

## Medical wait times cost Canadian patients over \$2 billion in lost wages before COVID-19

April 13, 2021  
For Immediate Release

**VANCOUVER**—Long waits for surgery and medical treatment cost Canadians almost \$2.8 billion in lost wages and productivity last year, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

Preliminary data suggest that an estimated 1.2 million patients waited for medically necessary treatment last year, and each lost an estimated \$2,254 (on average) due to lost wages and reduced productivity during working hours.

“Health-care workers across Canada should be commended for the superb job they’re doing to get us through this global pandemic. However, while we are constantly reminded of the consequences of COVID-19, less discussed are the [consequences of unreasonable waits](#) for surgery which can range from physical pain and psychological distress for some, to permanent disability and death for others,” said Bacchus Barua, associate director of health policy studies at the Fraser Institute and co-author of *The Private Cost of Public Queues for Medically Necessary Care, 2021*.

Across Canada, the costs of waiting for medical care were about \$2.8 billion.

The study draws upon data from the Fraser Institute’s *Waiting Your Turn* study, an annual survey of Canadian physicians who, in 2020, reported the national median waiting time from specialist appointment to treatment was 12.1 weeks.

Crucially, the \$2.8 billion in lost wages is likely a conservative estimate because it doesn’t account for the additional 10.5-week wait to see a specialist after receiving a referral from a general practitioner.

Taken together (10.5 weeks and 12.1 weeks), the total median wait time in Canada for medical treatment was 22.6 weeks in 2020 - the longest in the survey’s 30-year history.

“While some of this backlog is the direct result of COVID-19 related closures, results from the same survey suggest that almost as many (1.1 million) patients were waiting for treatment in 2019 – before the pandemic started,” said Mackenzie Moir, Fraser Institute Policy Analyst and study co-author.

Because wait times and incomes vary by province, so does the cost of waiting for health care. While the highest cost of waiting per capita is estimated to be borne by patients in Prince Edward Island (\$4,130), maritime provinces reported large increases in the per capita cost of waiting suggesting their results should be interpreted with caution. Outside the maritime provinces, residents of Alberta faced the highest per-patient cost of waiting (\$2,830), followed by Saskatchewan (\$2,505), and Manitoba (\$2,371).

“Long health-care wait times mean lost wages and a reduced quality of life for patients. While combatting COVID-19 certainly requires our immediate attention, we may need to consider policy options that can benefit all patients and alleviate strain on our public health-care system.” Barua said.

**Average value of time lost during the work week in 2020 for patients waiting for medically necessary treatment (by province):**

British Columbia	\$2,330
------------------	---------

<b>Alberta</b>	\$2,830
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	\$2,505
<b>Manitoba</b>	\$2,371
<b>Ontario</b>	\$1,547
<b>Quebec</b>	\$1,632
<b>New Brunswick</b>	\$2,311
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	\$4,122
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	\$4,130
<b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b>	\$3,287

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Bacchus Barua, Associate Director, Health Policy Studies  
Fraser Institute

Mackenzie Moir, Policy Analyst, Health Policy Studies  
Fraser Institute

*To arrange media interviews or for more information, please contact:*

Drue MacPherson, Fraser Institute

Tel: (604) 688-0221 Ext. 721

E-mail: [drue.macpherson@fraserinstitute.org](mailto:drue.macpherson@fraserinstitute.org)

Follow the Fraser Institute on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

The Fraser Institute is an independent Canadian public policy research and educational organization with offices in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal and ties to a global network of think-tanks in 87 countries. Its mission is to improve the quality of life for Canadians, their families and future generations by studying, measuring and broadly communicating the effects of government policies, entrepreneurship and choice on their well-being. To protect the Institute's independence, it does not accept grants from governments or contracts for research. Visit [www.fraserinstitute.org](http://www.fraserinstitute.org)