

NEWS RELEASE

Canada’s health-care wait times hit 27.7 weeks in 2023—longest ever recorded

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For immediate release

VANCOUVER—Canadian patients waited longer than ever this year for medical treatment, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

The study, an annual survey of physicians across Canada, reports a median wait time of 27.7 weeks—the longest ever recorded, longer than the wait of 27.4 weeks reported in 2022—and 198 per cent higher than the 9.3 weeks Canadians waited in 1993, when the Fraser Institute began tracking wait times.

“COVID-19 and related hospital closures have exacerbated, but are not the cause, of Canada’s historic wait times challenges,” said Bacchus Barua, director of the Fraser Institute’s Centre for Health Policy Studies and co-author of *Waiting Your Turn: Wait Times for Health Care in Canada, 2023*.

“Previous results revealed that patients waited an estimated 20.9 weeks for medically necessary elective care in 2019—long before the pandemic started.”

The study examines the total wait time faced by patients across 12 medical specialties from referral by a general practitioner (i.e. family doctor) to consultation with a specialist, to when the patient ultimately receives treatment.

More than 1,200 responses were received across the 12 specialities and 10 provinces.

Among the provinces, Ontario recorded the shortest wait time at 21.6 weeks—still up from 20.3 weeks in 2022. Nova Scotia recorded the longest wait time in Canada at 56.7 weeks.

Among the various specialties, national wait times were longest between a referral by a GP and plastic (52.4 weeks), orthopaedic (44.3) neurosurgery (43.5). Wait times were shortest for radiation (4.4 weeks) and medical oncology treatments (4.8 weeks).

Patients also experience significant waiting times for various diagnostic technologies. This year, Canadians could expect to wait 6.6 weeks for a computed tomography (CT) scan, 12.9 weeks for a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan, and 5.3 weeks for an ultrasound.

Crucially, physicians report that their patients are waiting over four and a half weeks longer for treatment (after seeing a specialist) than what they consider to be clinically reasonable.

“Excessively long wait times remain a defining characteristic of Canada’s health-care system” said Mackenzie Moir, Fraser Institute policy analyst and co-author of the report.

“And they aren’t simply minor inconveniences, they can result in increased suffering for patients, lost productivity at work, a decreased quality of life, and in the worst cases, disability or death.”

Median wait times by province (in weeks)

PROVINCE	2022	2023	PROVINCE	2022	2023
British Columbia	25.8	27.7	Quebec	29.4	27.6
Alberta	33.3	33.5	New Brunswick	43.3	52.6
Saskatchewan	30.1	31.0	Nova Scotia	58.2	56.7
Manitoba	41.3	29.1	P.E.I.	64.7	55.2

Ontario	20.3	21.6	Newfoundland and Labrador	32.1	33.3
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