

Position Paper

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Innovation and Medical Technology Adoption to Address Medical Services and Surgical Backlogs in Canada



Introduction

As medical services and surgical backlogs created and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic continue to cause significant challenges to patients and our health care systems, we must turn to innovative solutions to ease the threat of access to timely patient care by reducing the burden on our limited health human resources. Innovative medical technologies provide ways to reduce demand on the system while also improving patient experiences and outcomes. The continuous adoption of innovative, modern medical technologies into healthcare systems aids in reducing length of stay, readmittance, complications, and need for in-person visits. Providing innovative medical technologies can also help attract and retain clinicians, since these technologies can help them provide the best possible care to their patients.¹

Examples of how medical technologies can assist with the backlogs and creating health system efficiencies can be found at www.medtechinnovation.ca/medtech-solutions

Traditionally, jurisdictions across Canada have not excelled at achieving widespread adoption of innovative

technologies into our healthcare systems, despite the patient and health system efficiency benefits these technologies can provide. However, during the pandemic it was shown that Canada does have the potential to reduce barriers to their adoption. For example, the speed to market of COVID-19 tests (in all their forms) highlighted the importance of innovative medical technologies to respond to any healthcare crisis. This lesson is critical for us to learn from and continue with the momentum of adopting new technologies into our health care system. This is key to our success in combating ongoing issues that we face today as well as plan for future issues that may arise. Innovative medical technologies have a significant role to play in creating efficiencies and increasing the resilience of our healthcare system, while consistently contributing to improving our Canadian population patient outcomes on an ongoing basis.

An example of how technologies can help with the backlogs is the adoption of minimally invasive surgeries - a technique through which medical teams use small incisions and specialized tools to perform surgery. While the technology required for minimally invasive procedures can be more costly in the short term than traditional open surgery, researchers have proven they generate overall cost savings to the health system in the long term. Some minimally invasive procedures can even be performed in a catheterization laboratory, freeing up operating-room time. Additionally, there's a wealth of research that shows patients who undergo minimally invasive procedures can experience lower rates of complications, shorter hospital stays, decreased blood loss and lower readmittance rates.

Toronto Star, 2022²

1. New cancer treatment technology at Halifax hospital | CTV News

2. <https://www.thestar.com/business/opinion/2021/05/16/the-pandemic-created-a-huge-surgical-backlog-and-to-cut-it-down-ontario-needs-medical-innovation.html>

Background

In March 2020, provincial governments issued Directives for hospitals to suspend non-urgent scheduled surgeries and procedures to create acute care capacity for COVID-19 patients. While this approach did result in immediate availability of hospital resources, it has also contributed to a significant backlog in medically necessary surgeries and services as well as unintentionally creating a side effect of negative healthcare outcomes related to the patients whose procedures were delayed and/or cancelled.

Wait times for services pre-COVID-19 were already a topic of focus in Canada. The COVID-19 directives mentioned above resulted in further delays that negatively impacted the health of patients, including their ability to get back to work and contribute to the economic recovery.

The innovative medical technology industry can help address these backlogs. To leverage the role innovative medical technologies can play in addressing these backlogs, it is also important to understand the interdependence of the national and global supply chain. This reality will need to be carefully managed over coming months so the Canadian healthcare system can respond and provide care for patients.

Current Environment

Research by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) indicates that, almost 600,000 fewer procedures were performed across Canada (excluding Quebec) in the first twenty-two months of the pandemic compared with 2019.³

In Ontario, the 2021 Ontario Medical Association report, "Prescription for Ontario: Doctors' 5-Point Plan for Better Health Care"⁴, highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic has created a backlog of more than 20 million patient services which include preventive care, cancer screening, surgeries and procedures, routine immunizations, and diagnostic tests such as MRIs and CT scans, mammograms, and colonoscopies.

In Quebec it has been reported that 22,000 patients have been awaiting surgery for one year or longer – a substantially higher number than the 2,500 Quebecers waiting that long pre-pandemic⁵.

As of September 2022, Alberta had 73,000 patients awaiting surgery.⁶

These are just a few examples and there are others across the country – each number representing a patient waiting in pain or awaiting a potentially life-saving diagnosis. And it's important to note that even when the backlogs are cleared, wait times for key procedures in Canada were also problematic before the pandemic. For example,

CIHI data shows that more than a quarter of patients were not receiving hip and knee replacement or cataract procedures within benchmark time frames prior to the pandemic.⁷

Recommendations to Governments

Innovative medical technologies and solutions have an critically important role to play in addressing surgical and procedural backlogs. Medtech Canada is calling on governments, healthcare systems, and the medtech industry to work together to address this crisis.

Medtech Canada members provide technology solutions and support to health care providers in Canada and around the world. Based on these experiences and the available solutions, our association provides the following recommendations to help address medical service and surgical wait list challenges across Canada.

1. Dedicated funding for technologies that support the easing of the backlog
 - Address the backlog in deferred services as quickly as possible with incremental funding to expand capacity and investments in high-value medical interventions to preserve hospital resources.
 - Ensure that care teams in roles with the greatest potential impact on clearing backlogs receive the funding needed to acquire the tools, technologies and training that can increase efficiency and quality of care delivery.
 - Opportunities exist to build off existing initiatives in some jurisdictions. For example, the recent Ontario Surgical Innovation Fund should be renewed and expanded upon, and the [Quebec Health Innovation Strategic Committee](#) that was set up in the spring of 2022 could certainly play a central role in stimulating calls for innovation that can help solve the backlog issue.
2. Engage with industry on solutions
 - Engage with the medical technology industry to identify solutions from both a Canadian and global best practice perspective to address the current backlog.
 - As evidenced though our Medtech Canada

3. [Wait times for priority procedures in Canada | CIHI](#)

4. <https://www.oma.org/uploadedfiles/oma/media/public/prescription-for-ontario-doctors-5-point-plan-for-better-health-care.pdf>

5. [La réduction des listes d'attente en chirurgie traîne de la patte | Le Devoir](#)

6. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/ucp-to-contract-more-private-surgeries-in-south-and-central-alberta>

7. [Wait times for priority procedures in Canada | CIHI](#)

COVID-19 Action Hub – www.medtechinnovation.ca/medtech-solutions– the medical technology industry in Canada can play a critical role in addressing these challenges.

- Create “specialty tables” to prioritize and expeditiously address the backlog for services that are considered most urgent and include consultation with relevant medtech industry partners on how to leverage innovation to support surgical backlogs.
 - Identify and target the following as a high priority in the task force:
 - High volume procedures (procedures that are more common and occur at high volume)
 - Procedures that have a high resource impact on the healthcare system
 - Procedures with longer than acceptable wait times
- 3. Setting targets to reduce wait times/backlogs**
- Governments should set realistic targets to meet benchmarks as soon as possible. These targets should be reassessed in line with implementation of related improvements identified in Recommendation #2.
- 4. Health System Reorganization & Prioritization of Patients**
- Consider leveraging alternate care sites that can provide additional capacity to assist with addressing the backlog, similar to other jurisdictions while respecting the Canada Health Act.
 - Create a single-entry referral model to link the highest priority cases and patients with the facility best equipped to immediately respond to the need.
- 5. Better Demand Planning and Data Transparency**
- Ensure planning for possible future COVID-19 waves

starts now with the medical technology industry, leveraging what has been learned from earlier waves. Critical components of the plan should include optimal inventory management, sustainable domestic manufacturing, multi- source suppliers and international collaboration for Canada to be able to respond appropriately to the needs for both COVID and non-COVID patients.

- Provide procedural data by hospital, as information becomes available, for medical technology companies to be able to meet both the immediate and future customer demand for essential products. COVID-19 has significantly disrupted what would be traditional inventory ordering patterns used for business forecasting. Ideally this data would include the number and type of procedures by priority both for backlog cases and anticipated volume over the next 6 months.
- Leverage data and analytic tools that can provide the necessary guidance and insights to strategically maximize available capacity and make that data available to industry partners to give them the ability provide innovations and insights into how to leverage that information.

Conclusion

Canadian patients have been significantly impacted by the suspension of scheduled surgeries and this will continue while wait times remain at the current levels.

Canada’s medtech sector has been proud to answer the call to provide the necessary medical supplies and equipment in the early days of this pandemic. And we have a vast network of Canadian and global resources that can be mobilized to implement and support new solutions to address wait times and health system efficiency challenges – many of which can be implemented at-scale and quickly. Medtech Canada looks forward to continue working with our government and health system partners as we seek to address these challenges together for the benefit of patients and Canada’s health care systems.

ABOUT MEDTECH CANADA

Medtech Canada is the national association representing the medical technology industry in Canada. Our association advocates for achieving patient access to leading edge, innovative technology solutions that provide valuable outcomes. Our members are committed to providing safe and innovative medical technologies that enhance the quality of patient care, improve patient access to health care, and help enable the sustainability of our health care system. The medical technology industry in Canada employs over 35,000 Canadians in approximately 1,500 facilities across the country.