



NEWS RELEASE

Medical wait times cost Canadian patients more than \$2 billion in lost wages in 2018

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For Immediate Release

VANCOUVER—Long waits for surgery and medical treatment cost Canadians \$2.1 billion in lost wages last year, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

It's estimated more than one million Canadians waited for medically necessary treatment in 2018.

“Waiting for medically necessary treatment remains a hallmark of the Canadian health-care system, and in addition to increased pain and suffering—and potentially worse medical outcomes—these long waits also cost Canadians time at work and with family and friends,” 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, 2019*.

The study finds that the estimated 1,082,541 patients who waited for medically necessary treatment last year each lost \$1,924 (on average) due to lost wages and reduced productivity during working hours, or \$2.1 billion combined.

When including the value of time outside the traditional work week—evenings and weekends (excluding eight hours of sleep per night)—the estimated cost of waiting jumps from \$2.1 billion to \$6.3 billion, or \$5,860 per patient.

The study draws upon data from the Fraser Institute's *Waiting Your Turn* study, an annual survey of Canadian physicians who, in 2018, reported a median wait time from specialist appointment to treatment of 11 weeks—three weeks longer than what physicians consider clinically reasonable.

Crucially, the \$2.1 billion in lost wages is likely a conservative estimate because it doesn't account for the additional 8.7-week wait to see a specialist after receiving a referral from a general practitioner. Taken together (11 weeks and 8.7 weeks), the median wait time in Canada for medical treatment was 19.8 weeks in 2018.

“As long as lengthy wait times define Canada's health-care system, patients will continue to pay a price in lost wages and reduced quality of life,” Barua said.

Because wait times and incomes vary by province, so does the cost of waiting for health care. Residents of Manitoba in 2018 faced the highest per-patient cost of waiting (\$2,852), followed by P.E.I. (\$2,594) and Alberta (\$2,538).

Average value of time lost during the work week in 2018 for patients waiting for medically necessary treatment (by province):

British Columbia	\$2,455
Alberta	\$2,538
Saskatchewan	\$1,639
Manitoba	\$2,852
Ontario	\$1,368
Quebec	\$1,209
New Brunswick	\$2,391
Nova Scotia	\$2,487
Prince Edward Island	\$2,594
Newfoundland and Labrador	\$1,559

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