

CMA submission

Recommendations for federal action to address Canada's health care crisis

Submission to the House of Commons
Standing Committee on Finance

February 15, 2022

Summary of Recommendations for Budget 2022

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) respectfully submits the following recommendations for federal action in Budget 2022 to address Canada's current health care crisis and set course for the foundation of a strong health system moving forward:

Recommendation 1: Addressing the health workforce crisis

The CMA recommends that in Budget 2022, the federal government deliver targeted investments in:

- Initiating integrated, pan-Canadian health workforce planning;
- Critical health data infrastructure, including operationalizing the physician supply-needs planning tool and investing in extending this planning tool for other health professions; and,
- A new, pan-Canadian mental health action plan for health workers.

Recommendation 2: Increasing access to primary care

The CMA recommends that in Budget 2022, the federal government deliver on its \$3.2-billion commitment to increase access to a family doctor or primary care team for all Canadians, including: \$1.2 billion over four years to a Primary Care Integration Fund and \$2 million to assess inter-professional training capacity.

Recommendation 3: Addressing backlogs and improving access to quality care

The CMA recommends that the federal government deliver its targeted \$6 billion in funding commitments to address backlogs: \$3.2 billion for access to primary care and \$9 billion to support improving quality standards and access to long-term care.

Recommendation 4: Investing in our public health capacity

The CMA recommends the federal government invest \$1 billion in Budget 2022, with a commitment of additional funding over the next five years, to increase capacity and transform public health in Canada.

Recommendation 5: Eliminating interprovincial mobility barriers for health workers

The CMA recommends targeted investments in Budget 2022 for Parliamentary review on the regulatory barriers to the mobility and deployment of Canada's health workforce under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement, as well as a \$2 million investment to conduct a comparative assessment of provincial and territorial licensing and certification requirements for regulated health professionals.

Recommendation 6: Investing in, and working towards, reconciliation

The CMA recommends the federal government deliver further investments to: address the ongoing, structural inequities that marginalize Indigenous Peoples; advance the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in societal systems and sectors, including health systems; and, commit to collaborative and respectful relationships with Indigenous patients and communities.

Introduction

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) respectfully submits the recommendations outlined within this brief for consideration as part of the pre-budget consultation for Budget 2022.

The CMA strongly supports the many commitments by the federal government, as outlined in the Speech from the Throne, to strengthen health care systems and improve access to care. The CMA shares the position conveyed in the address on the Economic and Fiscal Update that “the best economic policy is a strong health policy.”

Unfortunately, the crisis in health care, including the burnout, exhaustion and shortage of the health workforce, has escalated beyond what any jurisdiction can address independently. Budget 2022 is a critical opportunity for the federal government to urgently invest in targeted areas to address the crisis in health care and set a new course for the future of our health system.

As such, the CMA is advancing the following recommendations for federal action and investment in six priority areas to shore up the foundations of our rapidly failing systems:

Recommendation 1: Addressing the health workforce crisis

In October 2021, the CMA co-hosted an emergency summit with the Canadian Nurses Association to hear from nearly 40 national and provincial health organizations representing nurses, physicians, respiratory therapists, personal support workers, psychologists and educational institutions. What we heard during this meeting constitutes a Canada-wide crisis in our health workforce and, by extension, our health systems.

For health workers, the pandemic has been unrelenting. Health workers have pushed themselves to near-breaking and beyond for one purpose: the care of their patients. Today, as we grapple with an Omicron-driven surge, Canada’s health workers are burnt out, exhausted and demoralized. While there are no quick fixes, there is an urgent need for federal action and investment to support addressing this pan-Canadian crisis.

The CMA recommends that in Budget 2022, the federal government deliver targeted investments in:

- Initiating integrated, pan-Canadian health workforce planning;

- Critical health data infrastructure, including operationalizing the physician supply-needs planning tool and investing in extending this planning tool for other health professions; and,
- A new, pan-Canadian mental health action plan for health workers.

The CMA stands ready to collaborate with the federal government to explore additional actions or investments to support addressing the health workforce crisis in Canada.

Recommendation 2: Increasing access to primary care

Canada's health workforce crisis is a health crisis. Simply put, there is no health care without health workers. The added strain of the pandemic on Canada's health workforce will further impact access to care. For example, prior to the pandemic approximately five million Canadians lacked access to a regular primary care provider. An assessment commissioned by the CMA identifies a significant shortfall of newly trained family physicians compared with advertised practice opportunities. As of December 2021, there were 2,448 postings seeking family physicians, while only 1,439 new family physicians emerged from training in 2020. The gap in 2021 between postings for new family physicians compared with newly trained family physicians was 1,009; compared with previous years this shortfall is increasing over time.

The CMA recommends that in Budget 2022, the federal government deliver on its \$3.2-billion commitment to increase access to a family doctor or primary care team for all Canadians. As part of this commitment, the CMA recommends that \$1.2 billion over four years be dedicated to a Primary Care Integration Fund, and \$2 million be invested to undertake an assessment of the inter-professional training capacity of family physicians and other professionals in the area of primary health care. This fund would support the spread and scale-up of integrated primary care models that would increase value and improve patient outcomes. The CMA is ready to work with the federal government to achieve these deliverables.

Recommendation 3: Addressing backlogs and improving access to quality care

Canada's health systems are facing unprecedented challenges impacting the ability to meet patient care needs. As outlined in the Deloitte report commissioned by the CMA, *A Struggling System: Understanding the Health Care Impacts of the Pandemic*¹, the impacts of the pandemic on access to care in Canada are as broad as they are stark. The report outlines significant increases in wait times, fewer home care assessments, reduced cancer screening, increased mental health care needs, and many more concerning indicators.

Additionally, another Deloitte report commissioned by the CMA earlier this year, *Canada's elder care crisis: Addressing the doubling demand*², identifies growing demands for long-term care and home care in Canada over the coming decade. Taken together, these analyses emphasize the urgent need for additional federal investment in health care. The CMA supports increasing federal health funding, both via the Canada Health Transfer and targeted funding. The CMA encourages the federal government to engage provincial/territorial premiers to collaborate in ensuring health systems can deliver the care people in Canada need.

The CMA recommends that in Budget 2022, the federal government deliver its targeted funding commitments for \$6 billion to support addressing backlogs and \$9 billion to support improving quality standards and access to long-term care.

Recommendation 4: Investing in our public health capacity

The COVID-19 pandemic represents the biggest public health crisis that Canada has confronted in a century. The *2021 Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada* outlines the current challenges of a public health system in need of critical reinforcements. Investments are needed to bolster public health capacity and address existing gaps identified as a result of the pandemic by strengthening the public health workforce, improving public health tools and databases, and ensuring stable and consistent funding to match the mandate of public health.

The CMA recommends the federal government invest \$1 billion in Budget 2022, with a commitment of additional funding over the next five years, to transform public health in Canada, bolstering public health capacity and addressing existing gaps identified during the pandemic.

Recommendation 5: Eliminating interprovincial mobility barriers for health workers

The CMA was pleased to learn that federal and provincial/territorial ministers discussed prioritizing collective efforts to improve labour mobility and credential recognition for Canada's health care sector at the recent meeting of the Committee on Internal Trade in December 2021.

The existing provincial-territorial regulatory-licensure framework creates a patchwork of varied licensing requirements and standards of practice. Any health professional wishing to provide care, whether in person or virtually, for patients in a jurisdiction other than their normal practice location must, with few exceptions, go through what may be a lengthy process of becoming licensed in that jurisdiction. The results are potential delays in the provision of care. Virtual care, a trend accelerated by COVID-19, is now an expectation. The use of this delivery system of care is not currently supported by the existing regulatory structure.

The CMA recommends the federal government support reducing interprovincial barriers to the mobility of health care workers in Canada by:

- Initiating a Parliamentary review on the regulatory barriers to the mobility and deployment of Canada's health workforce under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement; and,
- Investing \$2 million in Budget 2022 for a comparative assessment of provincial and territorial licensing and certification requirements for regulated health professions.

Recommendation 6: Investing in, and working towards, reconciliation

The CMA strongly supports the federal government's commitment to accelerate the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action*. More specifically, we recommend the federal government deliver further investments in Budget 2022 to:

- Address the ongoing structural inequities that marginalize Indigenous Peoples;
- Advance the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in societal systems and sectors, including health systems; and,
- Commit to collaborative and respectful relationships with Indigenous patients and communities.

Conclusion

Canada's health care system is at a crossroads. For years, we have warned that its foundation was stressed and we did not have the capacity or structure to meet the care needs of the aging population. The reality is that the COVID-19 pandemic took place ahead of the demographic shift and exposed these shortfalls first. These concerns and pressures remain.

The CMA is calling for strategic investment in Budget 2022 that will help address the current crises and set the course for a stronger health system; one that can withstand the challenges ahead and meet the care needs of our population. From aging of the population to climate change impacts on our health, Canadians will expect our health system to be there to meet their needs.

The CMA welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the federal government to address the health care needs of our population, including the implementation of these recommendations for urgent investments in Budget 2022.

References

¹ Canadian Medical Association, Deloitte. *A struggling system Understanding the health care impacts of the pandemic*. Ottawa: The Association; 2021. Available: <https://www.cma.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/health-advocacy/Deloitte-report-nov2021-EN.pdf> (accessed 2022 Feb 15).

² Canadian Medical Association, Deloitte. *Canada's elder care crisis: Addressing the doubling demand*. Ottawa: The Association; 2021. Available: <https://www.cma.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/health-advocacy/activity/CMA-LTC-Deloitte-Report-EN.pdf> (accessed 2022 Feb 15).