



Pre-budget Submission

2024



Prepared For

ASSOCIATION OF FACULTIES
OF MEDICINES CANADA

Background:

Canada's health care system is at a crucial crossroads, with challenges in securing stable and sufficient funding for the health care workforce, health research, and health system sustainability. The health care system in Canada is experiencing a notable shift, marked by an unprecedented influx of federal funding into the sector. In the initial months of 2023, the federal government disclosed a significant pledge of \$46.2 billion in new funding for the provinces through bilateral agreements. The main priorities of these agreements include increased access to primary care services, reduced health worker backlogs, improved mental health services and health care through digital health. Notably, there is zero mention of increased funding to health research in these agreements. As provinces and territories officially endorse the bilateral agreements and subsequently reveal their strategies for implementation, there is a competitive prioritization of issues within the health care system. Only 4 of Canada's provinces and territories have signed parts of their agreement with the government, allowing them access to their health funding. As other provinces contemplate these agreements, Canada's health care system continues to show gaps that need immediate remedy.

The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada (AFMC), a registered charity, is a pivotal asset for the Government of Canada. Dedicated to championing the mandates of all medical faculties nationwide in education, research, and social accountability, AFMC has the capacity to strategically influence the federal government's agenda towards a better, more robust health care system.

AFMC calls for increased federal investment in three key priority areas to elevate Canada's health care quality. There is a need for increased collaborative efforts between the federal and provincial/territorial governments to tackle the health human resource crisis, align medical school admissions with population growth and secure sufficient medical residency positions. Subsequently, Canada lags behind most of the G7 nations regarding research funding and the existing disparity poses a substantial obstacle to fostering a robust research ecosystem, impeding economic innovation and jeopardizing health security. Additionally, the urgent intersection of health care and climate change highlights the necessity of augmented investment in initiatives addressing the environmental impact of health institutions. These recommendations, outlined below, are pivotal in shaping Canada's health care, innovation, and environment.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Increase resource investment for collaboration with provincial/territorial governments to align medical school admissions with population growth and ensure adequate residency positions.

Canada faces a massive health human resource crisis, particularly in nursing and medicine. In 2023, Canada had 2.7 physicians per 1000 population (including residents)¹. The most significant gaps are in primary care, where 20% of Canadians cannot find a family physician¹. This leads to fewer Canadians receiving required health care, putting pressure on the health care professionals in clinics and hospitals, who are now facing increased burnout. Disparities are even worse in rural and remote areas, which often experience more significant challenges in recruiting and retaining health care professionals than urban centers. This has resulted in uneven distribution, with some regions having better access to health care than others.

Admissions to Canadian medical schools are not keeping pace with the population growth, leading to challenges for graduates securing residency positions. The delays in graduates entering practice impact health care delivery to Canadians. AFMC has addressed the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health, emphasizing the need for additional family medicine residency positions, particularly in underserved areas. The presentation was part of a study on Canada's health workforce shortages and potential solutions. The government of Canada needs to increase its focus on health human resources as they are essential players in the prosperity of all health systems in Canada.

Recommendation 2: That the federal government increase investment in research funding to improve the quality of health care for Canadians.

Canada must urgently increase its investment in health research, as evidenced by its meagre expenditure of just 1.5% of total public health spending on research, lagging far behind comparable countries like Australia (3.3%) and the United States (5.9%)². The per capita spending on health research in Canada, mainly through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), is only 16% of what the U.S. invests through its National Institutes of Health (NIH)². It is imperative to emphasize that while current federal investments in health are directed toward addressing the immediate requirements of health systems in provinces and territories, they may not adequately support the essential groundwork needed to plan for future health challenges. This can only be accomplished through increased investments in health research. Consequently, Canada faces the risk of being ill-prepared for potential future pandemics, lagging behind international counterparts in fostering collaborative research initiatives, and hindering the development of solutions for chronic and acute disease states.

Insufficient funding translates to low stipends for PhD students, hindering the support of emerging research talent and exacerbating challenges for marginalized communities. This affects opportunities for STEM students to pursue research in their fields, pushing them to look outside the

¹ <https://www.cma.ca/about-us/what-we-do/press-room/time-address-health-workforce-crisis-now>

² <https://rc-rc.ca/get-the-facts-research-in-trouble/>

country for financial support. A robust research ecosystem is crucial for economic innovation and health security, attracting foreign investment and ensuring that health care innovations align with all Canadians' diverse needs and priorities. In the upcoming Budget 2024, Canada has a unique opportunity to begin to be competitive with other G7 countries in economic and innovation prowess by prioritizing and substantially increasing investments in health research.

Recommendation 3: To bring key stakeholders together to provide direction on the need for the integration of issues related to climate change in medical education.

As the global climate scene begins to worsen, there is a greater need for medical professionals to have the education to mitigate and treat health issues caused by climate change. From the spread of zoonotic diseases to increased heat-related illness, to respiratory conditions related to poor air quality, to growing food insecurity, the effects of climate change on health and the determinants of health are becoming increasingly apparent³. Despite many practicing physicians acknowledging climate change as a significant health threat that should be addressed in their practice, there is a clear lack of guidance on actionable steps.

While some medical schools globally are making strides in incorporating a planetary health lens into their education and curricula, there is a recognized need for improvement in this regard within the Canadian medical education landscape. Establishing a table or group of key stakeholders from each region with expertise in climate change and medical education - including provincial governments - will provide the much-needed knowledge and direction as to the many health issues caused by climate change that need to be addressed and integrated in the medical education system.

This will allow future physicians to have the capacity to treat those affected by various negative environmental factors. AFMC encourages the federal government to convene these necessary experts together to ensure that Canadian medical schools are equipped with this knowledge and can therefore provide robust care for Canadians across the country dealing with the health issues due to the worsening climate crisis.

Conclusion:

The pre-budget submission underlines the critical need for increased federal investment in three priority areas to enhance the quality of health care in Canada. The recommendation to collaborate between the federal and provincial/territorial governments is essential to address the health human resource crisis by improving opportunities for young medical professionals through medical school admissions and ensuring adequate residency positions. Additionally, it is vital that the

³ Fairweather, V., Hertig, E. and Traidl-Hoffmann, C. (2020), A brief introduction to climate change and health. *Allergy*, 75: 2352-2354. <https://doi.org/10.1111/all.14511>

federal government substantially increase investments in health research in Budget 2024 for Canada to be adequately prepared for impending health crisis as well as increase its economic growth and innovative capacities which are severely behind globally. Lastly, the federal government has an important role to play in equipping our medical students with education related to climate change by convening tables of experts in both climate change and medical education -including government- to ensure Canadian physicians are able to provide adequate care in this changing environment.