



**Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in
Advance of the 2025 Federal Budget**

July 31, 2024

AFMC provides the following recommendations to the Government of Canada, for the Finance Committee to consider in their 2025 federal budget:

- 1) Invest in the capacity of medical schools so they can train more doctors.
- 2) Invest in the well-being and professional development of health care professionals to enhance retention rates.
- 3) Incentivize students in residency programs to train in family medicine and rural and remote communities.
- 4) Help create sustainable pathways for international medical graduates (IMGS) and foreign medical graduates (FMGs) to enter practice in Canada.
- 5) Accelerate recent financial commitments to graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.
- 6) Involve the AFMC in decisions respecting structural changes to the research ecosystem and in the establishment of the new capstone organization.
- 7) Invest in long-term, consistent, collaborative health research strategies and tactics.
- 8) Invest in strategies to reduce the negative environmental impact of health institutions.
- 9) Help shape medical education and research related to the treatment of climate-related illnesses.

Introduction

As the representative body of Canada's 17 faculties of medicine, the AFMC is dedicated to advancing medical education, research, and social accountability across the country, for the health of all Canadians.

In this submission, we highlight three critical areas requiring urgent attention and investment from the federal government:

- **The Health Human Resources (HHR) crisis**
- **Needs within Canada's health research ecosystem**
- **Planetary health concerns**

The HHR crisis in Canada has reached unprecedented levels, with severe shortages of health care professionals jeopardizing the quality and accessibility of medical care for Canadians.¹ We call for strategic investments to expand the capacity of medical training programs, to support the well-being and retention of medical students and doctors, to incentivize students to complete their residency training in family medicine and rural and remote areas, and to create sustainable pathways for international medical graduates (IMGs) to enter the Canadian system.

We also encourage the government to continue to bolster Canada's health research ecosystem, which is crucial for driving innovation, improving health care for Canadians and promoting economic growth. AFMC urges the government to accelerate its recent commitment to increase graduate student stipends and awards. We also urge the government to involve the AFMC in decisions respecting structural changes to the research ecosystem and in the establishment of the new capstone organization. Priority investments should also be made in long-term, consistent, collaborative health research strategies and tactics that flow independently from the election cycle.

Finally, we urge the government to consider the negative impact current medical practices have on the planet and to invest in more environmentally sustainable strategies and systems. We also urge the government to convene experts and stakeholders needed to develop curriculum and professional standards for doctors to best treat climate related illnesses.

AFMC stands ready to collaborate with the government and stakeholders to implement these measures, ensuring a healthier and more equitable Canada.

¹ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-crisis-in-health-care-staffing-is-no-secret-so-dont-try-to-hide/>

Health Human Resources

Recommendation 1: Invest in the capacity of medical schools so they can train more doctors

The complexity of the Canadian health care system has compounded the difficulties in addressing the health human resources (HHR) crisis. The challenges are multifaceted, involving recruitment, retention, workforce mental health, data management, and productivity. This intricate scenario has led to a situation where significant changes are needed to ensure long-term stability and sustainability.

One ongoing strategy to mitigate this issue is improving Canada's domestic capacity to train medical doctors. To grow Canada's domestic medical profession pipeline, the government needs to work closely with provincial governments and individual medical schools to determine where seats can readily be added, and where improved infrastructure and capacity are required.

Targeted, long-term support is required to build capacity within medical schools, including investment in staff, faculty, preceptors, and physical infrastructure. Existing training programs are already stretched; simply adding more seats without supporting capacity will cause learners to receive subpar medical training and cause instructional talent to burnout.

The government must also invest in postgraduate residency positions to ensure that all medical graduates can complete their training in Canada and enter the workforce. Addressing bottlenecks in specialty training programs where shortages are most acute is crucial.

Recommendation 2: Invest in the well-being and professional development of health care professionals to enhance retention rates

Burnout remains a significant issue among medical students and doctors alike, and comprehensive mental health and well-being support programs are essential to support the medical workforce. By improving and sustaining the health of our doctors, we also improve and sustain the overall health care system. Conversely, the failure to address burnout among learners and doctors will have a disproportionately negative impact on the delivery of care, as well as on financial investments into the system.

Recommendations include allocating resources for counselling services, wellness initiatives and peer support networks, alongside funding programs for continuing medical education and professional development.

Recommendation 3: Incentivize students entering residency programs to train in family medicine and in rural and remote communities

Access to health care is a significant issue in Canada, particularly in rural and remote communities. Incentives such as financial benefits and tuition reimbursement attract medical professionals to rural areas. For instance, the *Rural Education Supplement and Integrated Doctor Experience (RESIDE)* program in Alberta offers significant financial incentives to new family physicians willing to practice in rural communities.² The students and postgraduate doctors who train in rural and remote areas often stay.³

In parallel, training is needed to increase awareness and sensitivity among medical students and residents as to what they should expect in a rural or remote practice, before they decide to relocate.

Recommendation 4: Help create sustainable pathways for international medical graduates (IMGs) and foreign medical graduates (FMGs) to enter practice in Canada

The federal government must collaborate with provinces and medical schools to establish streamlined and sustainable pathways for international medical graduates (IMGs) who want to complete their residency in Canada. Investments should build upon existing best practices, such as the *Pathways to Practice for IMG's* model utilized at the University of Manitoba.

The federal government can also play a significant role here by funding language and cultural safety training programs, supporting bridging programs, mentorship, and ensuring residency placements. These measures are necessary to efficiently integrate IMGs into the Canadian health care system, addressing immediate shortages while maintaining long-term workforce stability. Pathways are also necessary to foster the integration of physicians who have relocated to Canada (FMGs) to enter practice safely and effectively.

Health Research

Recommendation 5: Accelerate recent financial commitments to graduate students and post-doctoral fellows

The AFMC applauds the investments in health research outlined in Budget 2024. We urge the government to accelerate the roll out of recent commitments to graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, so they feel the impact of increased stipends and scholarships sooner and so these commitments are not at risk of being lost in a future election.

² <https://rhpap.ca/news-events/media-release-rural-communities-will-attract-new-doctors/>

³ <https://www.cma.ca/latest-stories/canadas-health-care-crisis-what-we-need-now>

Recommendation 6: Involve the AFMC in decisions respecting structural changes to the research ecosystem and in the establishment of the new capstone organization

The new capstone organization proposed in Budget 2024 needs to streamline support and funding for collaborative research projects that bring together experts from various disciplines, including medicine, engineering, social sciences, and more. Interdisciplinary collaboration is key to addressing complex health challenges and driving innovation.

Structural changes should not be rushed and should include deep and varied input from across these sectors. The voice of medical educators and health researchers is integral to the establishment of an improved research ecosystem. New organizations within the structure should not come at the expense of others, such as the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

Recommendation 7: Invest in long-term, consistent, and collaborative research strategies and tactics

According to the *National Integrated Health Research Innovation Coalition* (NIHRIC), “To compete globally in health research and innovation, Canada must develop a long-term strategy and bold vision that builds on the core strengths of the Canadian research and innovation ecosystem. This vision should focus on transformational, long-term, and sustainable investment at scale in health research and innovation, ensuring the appropriate research infrastructure is in place, and attracting and retaining top-tier talent.”

To this end, the AFMC urges the government to invite, prioritize and invest in health research strategies and tactics that:

- Are long-term, consistent, and flow independently from the election cycle;
- Are collaborative in nature and involve industry;
- Focus on the needs of diverse populations (including research led by underrepresented groups, promoting diversity among research teams, and research that explores the social and ecological determinants of health);
- Connect Canadian talent with global researchers and counterparts;
- Drive infrastructure renewal; and
- Enable knowledge transfer and innovation.

Planetary Health

Recommendation 8: Invest in strategies to reduce the negative environmental impact of health institutions

Canada’s health system is responsible for 4.6% of Canada’s total greenhouse gas emissions, a higher percentage than aviation and shipping, making Canada one of the

world's worst health care polluters per capita.⁴ This is mainly attributed to the resource-intensive nature of hospitals, their continuous 24/7 operation, and the necessity for stringent ventilation and sterile procedure standards, leading to high energy consumption. Additionally, hospitals generate a substantial volume of waste, with the increasing reliance on single-use items such as disposable gowns, blood pressure cuffs, and surgical equipment.

Reducing this negative impact on the planet requires a collaborative approach from various sectors such as research, education, policy and clinical practice. The AFMC urges the government to consider recent work related to the *Academic Health Institutions' Declaration on Planetary Health*, and the *Roadmap for Planetary Health and Climate Resilient, Sustainable Low Carbon Health Systems for Canadian Medical Professionals*, to guide next steps and investments in this area.

Recommendation 9: Help shape medical education and research related to the treatment of climate-related illnesses

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 and the increase in heat-related illnesses, to respiratory conditions related to poor air quality and growing food insecurity, the effects of climate change on health and the determinants of health are becoming increasingly apparent.⁵

Despite many practicing physicians acknowledging climate change as a significant health threat that should be addressed in their practice, there is a lack of guidance on actionable steps they can take. 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 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 enable future physicians to effectively treat individuals 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

⁴ <https://www.cma.ca/our-focus/net-zero-emissions-health-system>

⁵ 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>

therefore provide robust care for Canadians across the country dealing with the health issues due to the worsening climate crisis.

Conclusion

The AFMC urges the federal government to take decisive action on these recommendations to address the HHR crisis, to strengthen the health research ecosystem, and to improve planetary health impacts. By investing in these critical areas, Canada can build a more resilient health care system, foster medical innovation, and improve health outcomes for all Canadians.

In closing, we reiterate our commitment to working with the federal government to ensure that Canada's health care system is equipped to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. Together, we can create a healthier, more innovative, and more equitable future for all Canadians.