

**Technical Backgrounder for the
Wait Time Alliance Report Card – December 2015**

The Wait Time Alliance
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Ottawa, Ontario

Introduction

A technical backgrounder is needed for this report card because there are still no national standards for consistently measuring and reporting wait times across Canada. This document describes the methodology involved for Tables 1 and 2 of the 2015 WTA report card.

Limitations

The WTA's report card is intended to provide a snapshot of the current situation with wait times across Canadian jurisdictions. The data used in producing the report card were obtained from official government websites between July and August 2015. However, there are wide variations in the manner by which governments report wait time data, including timeliness of data, measurement standards, and use of indicators and benchmarks. Reported wait times generally do not factor in waits for consultation or the time taken to access family physicians.

Methods used to derive the grades in Table 1

WTA members were asked to provide their treatments to be included in the WTA 2015 report card. Recognizing that all of the procedures and treatments are important, WTA members selected their treatments based on the following criteria:

- A treatment that has the highest volume and or greatest return on investment.
- A treatment whose wait time could be significantly reduced with a simple and direct capacity increase of some piece of technology or personnel.

It is important to note that WTA members now have a list of nearly 1,000 treatments benchmarked. Both the colour and letter grades assigned for these benchmarks follow the same methodology used in assigning letter grades to the provincial wait time benchmarks

The provinces were informed in May 2015 that the WTA would be reviewing provincial websites as of July 1, 2015.

Table 1 grades provinces on two levels: (1) a letter grade based on the percentage of patients treated within the maximum accepted wait-time benchmarks; and (2) a colour grade to report on provincial performance trends between spring/early summer 2014 and 2015. These letter and colour grades represent a snapshot in time of where wait times stand as of spring/early summer, 2015.

Letter grades

Using information provided on the official provincial government web sites, performance relative to wait time benchmarks is graded using a standardized grading system as follows:

- A+: 90-100% of population treated within benchmark
- A: 80-89% of population treated within benchmark
- B: 70-79% of population treated within benchmark
- C: 60-69% of population treated within benchmark
- D: 50-59% of population treated within benchmark
- F: Less than 50% of population treated within benchmark

However, additional symbols are used with the grading of WTA selected treatments. They are applied as follows:

The ☼ symbol is assigned in instances that the province reports wait times for this specialty.

The ‘🕶️’ glasses symbol indicates that the province tracks wait times for this specific procedure but not in a manner that would permit it to be graded by WTA measures.

The ? symbol is assigned if the province does not report wait times for the particular treatment/procedure.

The diagonal line/ in white squares indicates that the service is not provided (i.e., Coronary Artery Bypass Graft surgery in PEI).

Reporting of wait times is highly variable from one province to another. Most provinces now report both the median and 90th percentile of the time in which patients are treated for a specific procedure. Some data are available only at the level of the region or institution as opposed to province-wide. Given this reality, the following approach was used to grade performance:

- A median wait time that falls below the pan-Canadian benchmark is graded as an F. The median wait time is the point at which 50% of patients have been treated, and 50% are still waiting.
- In provinces where data are presented by region, those centres where the notable majority of cases had been treated were used.

Weighting wait-time distributions

For provinces that report only median wait times, and where reported median wait times are below the wait-time benchmark, the percentage of patients treated within the wait-

time benchmark was estimated using a function derived from real life wait-time distributions.

Colour grades are independent of the letter grades

The colour grading component of Table 1 relies on provincial data used to assign the letter grades. To address the inconsistencies among the provinces in how they report on wait times, the colour grading is based on comparing each province's progress independently, according to how it tracks wait times. For example, if a province only tracks wait times according to median waits, the progress or lack of progress will be based on whether the median wait has increased or decreased in that province between the two years.

A colour graded scale is used to assess provincial performance as follows:

- Green square: increase in the number of patients treated within the wait-time benchmark over the previous year. In instances where the province reports on the percentage of population treated within timeframes, a green colour is awarded for a 5% increase or more. However, to take into account the fact that it becomes increasingly difficult to improve timely access as provinces get closer to achieving 100% of patients treated within the benchmark (i.e., moving from 90 to 95% of patients treated is more difficult than moving from 50 to 55% of patients treated), a weight is used for instances where provincial grades are above 80% (an increase is multiplied by 1.2 and a decrease is multiplied by 0.2—this 20% factor increase/decrease recognizes the grade of "A" in the top 20% of the set benchmark). Where a province only reports by median wait times, a green square is given when the median wait time has been reduced by 5% or more.
- Yellow square: no significant improvement in patients being treated within the wait time benchmark over the past year. For provinces that report on the percentage of population treated, a yellow square is given when the increase in patients treated within the benchmarks over the previous year is less than 5% or has decreased by 0 to 9%. For provinces reporting by median wait time, a yellow square is given if the median wait time has dropped by less than 5% or has increased from 0 to 9% over the previous year.
- Red square: a decrease in the number of people treated within the benchmark by 10% or more over the previous year. For provinces reporting by median wait times, a red square is issued for an increase in median wait times over the previous year by 10% or more. As indicated under the explanation for the green square, a 20% factor was applied to decreases in grades over 80%.
- Orange square: insufficient data to make a determination (e.g., only 1 year of data or data not provided on a provincial basis) or the method of reporting changed to prevent a comparison between the 2 years.

Criteria used to grade provincial wait-time websites (Table 2)

Provincial wait-time web-sites were assessed according to five categories:

1. Timeliness
2. Comprehensiveness
3. Patient-friendliness/Accessibility
4. Performance orientation
5. Quality/reliability

Scoring for the WTA Grading of Provincial Wait-Time Websites

There is a maximum of 5 points for each of the 5 criteria: total perfect score = $25 \div 5 = 5$ composite score.

1. Timeliness - How recent are the reported wait times – both in terms of how recent are the data reported and how often are the data updated?

- 5 points: Real time (patients can see current wait times)
- 4 points: Data updated every 2 months or less; latest data less than 2 months old
- 3 points: Data updated every 2 months; but data older than 2 months
- 2 points: Data updated every 3-4 months
- 1 point: Data updated every 5-6 months
- 0 points: Data older than 6 months

Note: Deduct 1 point if data are updated infrequently (i.e., less than a quarterly basis).

2. Comprehensiveness – How comprehensive is the range of procedures/treatments reported?

- 5 points: A wide range of procedures/services are reported, as well as sub-specialties, emergency department wait-times; and/or specialist consultations
- 4 points: A wide range of procedures/services are reported, as well as a limited number of sub-specialties and/or emergency department wait-times
- 3 points: A wide range of procedures/services are reported but data not broken down by sub-specialty, emergency wait-times not provided
- 2 points: Limited number of procedures beyond the 5 priority areas (between 5-10 procedures) and data not broken down by sub-specialty
- 1 point: Data only provided for the 4-5 priority areas (i.e., might not include diagnostic imaging since no pan-Canadian benchmarks were agreed upon)

3. Patient-friendly/Accessible - Is the information on wait times easy to find and use for patients/public and for their providers? Factors to be considered include:

- **Wait-time website link is easy to find** (e.g., found on either government opening page or Ministry of Health opening page; all information is found at one site or there are clear and visible links to other sites (e.g., emergency department, cancer care).
- **Information is presented in a public/patient-friendly format:**
 - Easy to read layout (not too much text, readable font size, indicates how recent the data are, good use of diagrams such as the care pathway).
 - Uses patient-friendly terms (does not use overly technical terms that patients or public would not understand)
 - Has few or no broken links
 - Provides links to directions for facilities (e.g., Google maps)
 - Allows for feedback on the quality of the website
 - The website is mobile compatible
- **Information is easy to use:**
 - Simple to navigate (e.g., not too many clicks are required to get the desired information; easy to select procedures such as by clicking on a picture of a human body).
 - Wait time information is available on a local or regional level
 - Wait time information can be requested for a comprehensive variety of specialty areas/procedures
 - Wait time information is available for hospital emergency departments
 - Capable of identifying region or hospital with shortest wait time
 - Capable of comparing actual wait times to benchmarks/targets
 - Background information on how waits are defined and calculated is provided along with other information to assist patients (e.g., frequently asked questions)

The assessment of the **Patient-friendly/Accessible** criterion was undertaken by patient groups in an effort to incorporate the patients' voice in this review process.ⁱ

4. Performance orientation – How are we doing?

Information reported includes:

- Multiple ways to assess performance (e.g., median wait time, 95% treated within target, average wait time) (1 point)
- Links to actual wait times to pan-Canadian or provincial performance targets (1 point)
- The number of patients waiting for treatment (1 point)
- The number of procedures performed (1 point)
- Trend data (1 point)

5. Quality/Reliability – What assurances are there that the data are accurate and reliable?

Criteria are as follows:

- A trusted 3rd party has reviewed/audited data gathering processes (1 point)
- Data sources are provided (1 point)
- Limitations are identified (1 point)
- An explanation is provided on how the data are to be used/interpreted (1 point)
- Contact information is provided on the website to submit comments and/or ask questions (1 point).

In some cases half points were awarded where a province partially met the criteria.

ⁱ The WTA wishes to thank the Canadian Cancer Society and the National Association of Federal Retirees for providing the grading of the patient-friendly component of the websites.