

Wait Time Alliance

Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society

Promises, Promises: Canadians Still Waiting for Wait Time Guarantees

Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians

Ottawa, March 31, 2010 — The Wait Time Alliance (WTA) today expressed disappointment that some jurisdictions have still not fulfilled their 2007 promise to implement wait time guarantees, and other jurisdictions have implemented guarantees that are inconsistent and weak.

Canadian Association of Gastroenterology

“Canadians in every province and territory deserve to know that they will receive timely access to health care,” said Dr. Lorne Bellan, WTA Co-chair. “Wait time guarantees are one way of providing that certainty, but sadly some jurisdictions have not lived up to their commitments.”

Canadian Association of Paediatric Surgeons

Canadian Association of Nuclear Medicine

All provinces and territories committed to implement a wait time guarantee for at least one procedure or area of care by March 31, 2010 at the latest. Alberta and the three territories have either not implemented a guarantee as promised, or have not provided enough information for the WTA to be confident that a guarantee is in place. Even where guarantees have been implemented: they are very limited in scope; in many cases the timeframe for treatment under the guarantee exceeds the government benchmark; guarantees for the same procedure vary from province to province; and it is difficult for the public to know the guarantees exist. For example, Manitoba has guaranteed radiation therapy within 4 weeks, which is the government benchmark, but British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and P.E.I. have guaranteed radiation therapy within 8 weeks.

Canadian Association of Radiation Oncology

Canadian Association of Radiologists

Canadian Cardiovascular Society

“Even with guarantees in place, many Canadians continue to wait longer than is medically acceptable,” added Dr. Bellan. “Patients must not be considered second-class simply because of their postal code.”

Canadian Medical Association

Canadian Ophthalmological Society

Achieving “meaningful reductions in wait times” was a key commitment of the 2004 health accord signed by first ministers. The 2007 federal budget provided \$612 million for provinces and territories to implement wait time guarantees in at least one of the five priority areas — cancer care, heart procedures, diagnostic imaging, joint replacement and sight restoration — where government benchmarks for medically acceptable wait times were planned.

Canadian Orthopaedic Association

Canadian Psychiatric Association

“The most recent WTA report found only spotty progress in reducing wait times in the five key areas,” said Dr. Bellan. “However, even that apparent progress only takes into account the wait from specialist consultation to treatment, not the wait to see a family physician/GP and be referred to a specialist.”

Canadian Society of Plastic Surgeons

WTA research shows that the total wait experienced by patients in the five priority areas and additional areas of care can be much longer. In the coming months, the WTA will be releasing its 5th annual report card grading wait times across the country.

Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

The Wait Time Alliance (WTA) was formed out of concern among Canada's doctors over delayed access to care for their patients, and an interest in working collaboratively with stakeholders to improve wait times. The WTA continues to work to hold governments accountable for addressing lengthy wait times endured by patients throughout the health care system. The WTA comprises 14 national organizations whose members are directly involved in providing a wide range of specialty medical care to patients.

For more information, including a full list of guarantees promised by governments and their status, please go to: www.waittimealliance.ca.

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