



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New survey shows worrying waits for front-line care

Ottawa, Dec. 2, 2009 — A new poll of Canadians shows that public concern over the country's dire shortage of family doctors continues to run high.

“Access to high-quality primary care is the backbone of our health care system,” said Dr. Cathy MacLean, President of The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC). “This survey shows that Canadians are extremely concerned about the fact that without a family physician, their ability to access timely care is severely undermined.”

“As a family physician myself, I see every day the negative effects of Canada's physician shortage,” said Dr. Anne Doig, President of the Canadian Medical Association. “Family physicians are the health care system's front door and all too often patients are finding that door step pretty crowded.”

The public opinion polling, done by Ipsos for The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) and the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), looked at a variety of issues concerning Canadians' views on front-line physician care. The survey found:

- 17% of respondents do not have a family doctor;
- 84% of respondents are either “very” or “somewhat concerned” that many (over 10%) of Canadians do not have a family doctor;
- 84% of respondents are either “very” or “somewhat concerned” about the length of time it takes to see a specialist upon referral from a family doctor;
- 83% of respondents are either “very” or “somewhat concerned” about the length of time it takes to receive treatment following consultation with a specialist doctor;

Interestingly, the survey found that “only” 54% of respondents were concerned about the length of time it takes to get an appointment with a family doctor.

“The fact that about half of our patients feel confident they can get to see their doctor when they need to speaks to the fact that family physicians do all they can to provide care for their patients when they need it,” said Dr. MacLean.

“What we need to develop now are tools to help the other half of Canadians — the ones who cannot get to see their family doctor, or worse don't have one,” added Dr. Doig.

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To help address the issues raised by the survey and ongoing concerns over lengthy waits for primary care, the CFPC and CMA today released the final report of the Primary Care Wait Time Partnership. Entitled *The Wait Starts Here*, this report contains recommendations and areas for action that build on the wait time efforts that have focused mainly on access to specialty care to date.

“Canada has seen solid effort at measuring and mitigating wait times for patients to access high-quality specialty care,” said Dr. Doig. “We must never forget that, while patients may see many specialists for a variety of problems, family physicians play a critical role in managing and linking that care.”

The report includes several recommendations, including the fact that Canada must achieve the target of having 95% of the population in every Canadian community with a family doctor by 2012. In terms of patient waits for care, the report recommends that should wait time benchmarks for primary care be developed, they must be used as guides to drive improvements in timely access to care and not targets.

“This report highlights the need to better track wait times along the patient’s full continuum of care and work towards minimizing those waits,” said Dr. MacLean. “We hope that implementation of the report’s recommendations will help address the wait time issues and improve timely access to care for patients.”

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