

Cancer Action Now
Open letter to Premiers of Canada
June 2023

Dear Canada's Premiers:

As you convene in Winnipeg on July 10-12 to discuss pressing issues facing people living in Canada, we urge you to prioritize the hundreds of thousands of Canadians affected by delays and gaps in screening, diagnosis and treatment of all forms of cancers.

Cancer care has reached a crisis point because of widespread disruptions of screening, treatment and surgeries prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Statistics Canada, in 2020 diagnosis of cancer cases dropped 12.3% lower than the average annual rate over the previous five-year period,¹ which is likely due to difficulty in accessing primary care services and underscreening. This means more patients presenting with advanced stages of cancer, requiring aggressive treatments and more surgeries, adding more pressure and costs to already overburdened health systems.

In fact, recent research shows that 21,247 *additional* Canadians could lose their lives to cancer due to pandemic-related delays over the next decade.² These are lives that can be saved if you take urgent action now to address the gaps in screening, diagnosis, treatment, and surgeries.

Already in Canada we are seeing important and innovative initiatives to help the Cancer care system such as the recent changes in New Brunswick to support cancer patients and British Columbia's new Cancer Plan. We welcome these initiatives, but more work is needed across Canada. More collaboration across stakeholders and decision makers is also needed and we are pleased to see initiatives on this front, such as the recent launch of the all-party federal caucus on cancer.

To ensure people living in Canada have timely, equitable, and quality access to appropriate cancer care, we have come together to form [Cancer Action Now](#), a national alliance of patient organizations, professional associations, and life sciences companies who are witnessing the magnitude of the problem in our cancer care systems faced by those living with cancer.

We are calling on premiers to address the issues in our cancer care systems so that those living with cancer have a chance to live longer, better lives than anywhere else in the world. We need cancer action now.

We call on all premiers to:

1. Use new investments via the Canada Health Transfer and bilateral agreements to implement concrete measures that will **improve cancer care and patient outcomes**, with meaningful input from cancer stakeholders including patients and caregivers.
2. **Address backlogs in cancer diagnosis and care** by increasing cancer screening and treatment capacity by at least 10% over pre-pandemic levels,³ for a period of three years to regain ground we've lost due to the pandemic.

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230516/dq230516c-eng.htm>

² <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ijc.33884>

³ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ijc.33884>

3. Use the current Federal Provincial Territorial Conference of Deputy Ministers of Health structure to **convene a pan-Canadian working group** to address the issues impacting our cancer care systems.

Only with concerted, coordinated action can we close the widening gaps in cancer care and save lives. The above calls to action build on the fundamental and structural reforms needed in Canada's health-care system, especially around health data, primary care access, and healthcare workforce as outlined by many other stakeholders.

Please commit to taking cancer action now.

Sincerely,

Cancer Action Now Alliance Members

CC: Provincial and Territorial Health Ministers