

## **Canadians with cancer are asking “Where is cancer?” in the proposed health care plan announced yesterday**

**February 8, 2023** – As the Prime Minister and Premiers convened in Ottawa yesterday to discuss much-needed reforms to Canada’s health systems, cancer patients and stakeholder groups across the country are concerned by the lack of focus on cancer care outcomes in the new proposed plan.

Cancer Action Now, a national coalition of 30 health organizations, is sounding the alarm and urgently calling on governments to address the gaps in cancer care. This includes ensuring people in Canada have access to timely cancer screening, treatment and surgeries, no matter where they live.

While the discussion at the Federal-Provincial-Territorial meeting focused on funding and shared indicators for the health system more broadly, we urge provincial governments to make cancer a priority and ensure that cancer is a focus when rolling out provincial action plans on priority areas including: access to primary care, reducing surgical backlogs, access to mental health services and health data.

**Linda Rouillard, a mom of three from Quebec, who was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer after her pregnancy, described the challenges she experienced in dealing with the cancer care system:**

“I called about five clinics. Some told me that they were no longer taking patients because there were already too many requests due to the delays caused by the pandemic. I had to beg to be put on a waiting list as I was told that I would not get care for another two and a half months. I felt that I had run out of options. Next step was either finding a private clinic or flying to another province to get the care I needed, both of which were very expensive options. I had to fight for the request, and I had to fight to be seen earlier.”

We know that survival rates improve when cancer is detected early and the patient receives timely treatment. Linda is one of the many Canadians who have been let down by a crumbling cancer care system. Cancer was already the leading cause of death in Canada before the pandemic, but now it is estimated that an additional 21,000 lives will be lost needlessly by the end of the decade due to the backlog of cancer screenings, treatments and surgeries that built up during the pandemic.<sup>i</sup>

**Andrea Knox, Director-at-Large, External Relations for the Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology and a Cancer Action Now member, said:**

“While an increase in funding will help bolster health system capacity, it is also vital to map indicators, set benchmarks and ensure transparent data is collected against them to measure health system performance. This will ensure that evidence-based policy decisions are being made for Canada’s cancer care system and assess if the funding is having a desired impact in areas such as workforce planning and timely and equitable access to screening, diagnosis and treatment across Canada.”

The pandemic has shown us the power of coming together and working for a common cause. The meeting yesterday was the first step in the right direction; however, this collaboration needs to continue with patients, caregivers, and organizations like the Cancer Action Now alliance. Governments must make cancer a priority in the proposed 10 year health plan to save lives.

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**About Cancer Action Now:**

[\*Cancer Action Now\*](#) is a national alliance of patient organizations, professional associations, and life sciences companies who are witnessing the magnitude of the problem our cancer care systems and its patients are facing in light of the pandemic. We have come together to call on governments to address the issues in our cancer care systems so that Canadians with cancer have a chance to live longer, better lives than anywhere else in the world.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/ijc.33884>