

Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science

Responses

1. Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

Canada is facing a nation-wide shortage of medical laboratory technologists (MLTs). Over 44 per cent of Canada's MLTs will be eligible to retire in the next ten years. The current supply of new graduates will not be sufficient to address the projected shortages. MLTs play a vital role in the health of Canadians. To help address this shortage, CSMLS recommends that the federal government invest in a national health human resource strategy for the medical laboratory profession. This strategy would include targeted investments in clinical education, the integration of internationally educated MLTs, and MLT recruitment in rural areas. Staffing shortages at clinical sites are creating a shortage of clinical placements for medical laboratory science students. As with most health professions, clinical training is a vital component of medical laboratory science education; students cannot graduate from their programs without completing a clinical placement. With targeted investments in health innovation, the number of seats in the labour market can be increased and dedicated clinical educators will be able to support onsite clinical education. In order to support Internationally Educated Medical Laboratory Technologists (IEMLTs), the government should establish and maintain at least one bridging program in each region. This would address both health care resource challenges and the need for equitable treatment of newcomer professionals to Canada who expect employment in their profession. Bridging programs shorten the time for IEMLTs to become certified in Canada, decrease their financial hardships and expedite their integration into the Canadian laboratory workplace. As a result, IEMLTs can contribute to the Canadian economy much sooner. Investing in the integration of internationally educated professionals will create more jobs, helping to stimulate the national economy. Finally, a lack of financial support is a significant obstacle in recruiting new MLT graduates to rural areas. In order to ensure that all Canadians have access to quality health care, it is imperative to include MLT graduates in existing and new loan forgiveness and incentive programs aimed at recruiting and retaining health care professionals in our rural communities. Critical investments will help to improve Canadians' quality of life and will be key to future economic development.

2. Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

In order to promote job creation in Canada, the federal government must play a lead role to support Internationally Educated Medical Laboratory Technologists (IEMLTs) through the establishment of at least one sustainable bridging program in each region. This critical investment would address both health care resource challenges and the need for equitable treatment of newcomer professionals to Canada with expectation of employment in their profession. Investing in the integration of internationally educated professionals will create more jobs, helping to stimulate the national economy. The integration of internationally educated professionals into the Canadian workforce is a significant

challenge for all professions, including medical laboratory technology. CSMLS is committed to ensuring that their credentials are assessed fairly and efficiently while at the same time safeguarding the integrity of the national certification process. It is evident that there are internationally educated professionals looking to enter the Canadian workforce; however, there are currently not enough programs available to facilitate their entry. The establishment of regional bridging programs will shorten the time for IEMLTs to become certified in Canada, decrease their financial hardships and expedite their integration into the Canadian laboratory workplace. As a result, IEMLTs can contribute to the Canadian economy much sooner. There is no doubt that the integration of internationally educated health professions has benefited from recent attention and investment over the past several years. The Government of Canada is making significant progress to help skilled newcomers find jobs in their fields faster. The Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications is helping internationally trained health care practitioners put their knowledge and skills to work sooner in communities across Canada. CSMLS thanks the Government of Canada for its ongoing support; however, it is also clear that there is still room for improvement and advancement. A system that allows for additional training or practice in the Canadian context, that is accessible, affordable and reliable is imperative.

3. Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

Canada is presently facing a nation-wide shortage of medical laboratory technologists (MLTs). CSMLS predicts that over 44 per cent of Canada's MLTs will be eligible to retire in the next ten years. Since 1998, CSMLS has been alerting decision-makers that the number of seats in medical laboratory technology education programs is not sufficient to produce enough new graduates to replace those who will leave the workforce. Domestic supply is simply too low. It is estimated that there is still a shortage of approximately 100 seats annually. Positive steps must be taken to help combat this shortage. Historically, program funding is for the classroom portion only, with consideration for clinical education support. As with most health professions, clinical training is a vital component of medical laboratory science education. Students cannot graduate from their programs without completing a clinical placement. The Pan-Canadian Health Human Resources Plan explicitly recognizes the importance of clinical education and sets a specific goal of "increasing access to clinical training and clinical education." With targeted investments in innovative health care strategies, the number of seats in the programs can be increased and dedicated clinical educators will be able to support onsite clinical education. With the aging of the Canadian population, the medical needs of Canadians will continue to increase. Doctors and nurses depend on laboratory test results to accurately diagnose and treat illness, as well as monitor patient health. MLTs play a vital role in Canada's patient care system, generating over 440 million results each year. However, it is critical to note that the high volume of testing is not the only factor to consider. Canadians have a right to expect that the people who conduct their laboratory tests are qualified and competent. Medical laboratory professionals are committed to ensuring patient safety at all times, and without enough qualified individuals in medical laboratories, this patient safety may be compromised. Critical investments in clinical education will ensure that patient safety is protected and help maintain the high standards of practice for medical laboratory professionals that Canadians have come to expect.

4. Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

A lack of financial support is a significant obstacle in recruiting new medical laboratory technologist graduates to rural areas. In order to increase productivity in Canada and ensure that all Canadians have access to quality health care, it is imperative to include medical laboratory technology graduates in existing and new incentive programs aimed at recruiting and retaining health care professionals in our rural communities. Canada's health care system is not comprised of doctors and nurses alone. Medical laboratory professionals play an important role in the maintenance of Canadians' health. They work in many settings including hospitals, private laboratories, universities, research facilities, public health laboratories, and veterinary clinics. Doctors depend on laboratory test results to accurately diagnose and treat illness, and monitor patient health. Without qualified professionals to generate lab results, quality patient care is impossible. In order to combat the shortage of health care professionals in rural communities, the federal government has committed to forgive a portion of Canada Student Loans for new family physicians (up to \$8,000 per year to a maximum of \$40,000) and nurse practitioners and nurses (up to \$4,000 per year to a maximum of \$20,000). Given the vital role medical laboratory technologists play as part of the patient care team, they should be included in such programs. Inclusion in such programs will help improve Canadian's quality of life and access to care, to allow all medical laboratory professionals to contribute to their fullest potential of the Canadian marketplace. The Pan-Canadian Health Human Resources Plan explicitly recognizes the importance of clinical education and sets a specific goal of "increasing access to clinical training and clinical education." With targeted investments in health innovation, the number of seats in the labour market can be increased and dedicated clinical educators will be able to support onsite clinical education.

5. Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?

Health care continues to be the number one issue of importance for Canadians. A recent survey, conducted by the Institute for Research on Public Policy and Nanos Research, indicates that keeping Canada's health care system strong ranked the highest on the importance scale by Canadians. Of those surveyed, 24.9 per cent said health care was the issue of most importance to them. Conversely, health care, as the number one issue of importance, also received one of the lowest scores in Canadians' confidence in elected officials' ability to find a solution. CSMLS recognizes that Canada's health care system is a complex structure. The Government of Canada can take a more proactive role in developing a sustainable health care strategy. Critical investments in the areas of wellness, fitness, health promotion and health protection, among others, will help to reduce the burden of disease faced by Canadians, all the while reducing cost pressures on the Canadian health care system. Targeted, sustainable and long-term investments are urgently needed to maintain and improve Canada's health care system, of which medical laboratory professionals are a vital component. Canada's health care system is not comprised of doctors and nurses alone. Medical laboratory professionals provide critical information about an individual's health. Doctors depend on laboratory test results to accurately diagnose and treat illness, and monitor patient health. Without qualified professionals to generate lab results, quality patient care is impossible. With bold action and leadership from the federal government, medical laboratory professionals can maintain their high standards of practice and ensure that patient safety is protected at all times.

