



Written submission for the 2021 Federal Budget

CANADIAN THORACIC SOCIETY

August 7, 2020

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The federal government should commit funding to ensure an adequate, accessible, national supply of personal protective equipment and devices needed for treatment of respiratory illnesses.
2. The federal government should promote innovation to enhance delivery and quality of care for people experiencing respiratory illness and living with lung disease.
3. The federal government should invest in broad-based promotion of vaccination for respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19 when a vaccine becomes available, to reduce pressures on Canada's healthcare system and deliver better health outcomes for all Canadians.

Introduction

The Canadian Thoracic Society's mission is to promote lung health by enhancing the ability of healthcare professionals through leadership, collaboration, research, learning and advocacy, and providing the best respiratory practices in Canada.

We develop and disseminate evidence-based clinical practice guidelines and engage in knowledge translation activities for the benefit of our members, other health care professionals and the public at large. Our work is largely carried out by members who serve on a voluntary basis with an emphasis on professional development and education, research, and guidelines for both adult and pediatric populations. We are an accrediting body of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons for specialist education and continuing professional development.

We are proud of the role our members have played in treating patients with COVID-19, and the guidance they are able to provide to fellow health care professionals across a range of settings when confronting this new illness. Members are conducting research to advance the growing body of science concerning the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the illness it causes, including for treatment and identification of symptoms that have already contributed to saving lives.

Our recommendations centre on the opportunities to better prevent and mitigate illness in this context and for many years hence. We also wish to recognize the important contributions of policy makers, including the health experts at Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada, who have led by example throughout this pandemic. Without their guidance on early interventions the road to recovery would be a much more difficult path.

Recommendation 1: Ensuring an adequate, accessible, national supply of personal protective equipment and devices needed for treatment of respiratory illnesses.

An adequate, accessible, and national supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) and devices needed for treatment of respiratory illnesses for the healthcare sector is critical to managing COVID-19 and any pandemic moving forward.

In the absence of a vaccine or effective treatment, prevention is the best measure to keep more Canadians healthy and safe, and also to keep healthcare costs low. PPE is critical for prevention, both within the healthcare sector and in other sectors across Canada.

Ventilators have also been proven to be critical for the successful management and treatment of several respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. Severe cases of COVID-19 have resulted in a surge in demand for ventilators, causing a shortage in North America.

CTS Recommends:

The federal government continue to invest in an adequate national PPE supply, and increase its investment in the development and production of ventilators for COVID-19 treatment and for the treatment of other ongoing respiratory conditions. This commitment will ensure that the stockpile is sufficient for healthcare workers during COVID and beyond.

Recommendation 2: Promoting innovation to enhance delivery and quality of care in Canada's post-peak environment.

The pandemic has significantly disrupted the delivery of care in Canada's hospitals and across all care settings. In particular, the Canadian Thoracic Society is concerned with the backlog for patients living with lung illnesses, including Asthma and COPD, who would typically benefit from non-urgent, outpatient in-person consultations and diagnostic testing in pulmonary function testing (PFT) laboratories. Many of these facilities have been fully, or partially closed in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19.¹ PFT will be vital to ensuring Canada's health care system can address a backlog of cases and even help recovered COVID-19 patients achieve their best possible long-term health outcomes. PFT is used to "diagnose lung disease, monitor disease course and the effect of therapeutic interventions."² For patients with chronic underlying conditions, including cystic fibrosis, interstitial lung disease, and pulmonary hypertension, continued limited access to these test results could result in major setbacks for their courses of treatment. These health services are important to help thousands of Canadians and are an important part of our plan to recover from the pandemic.

CTS has also conducted research in Pulmonary Rehabilitation (PR) therapy for people with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)³, and other lung diseases. Through an extensive research study⁴, CTS has identified 14 core quality indicators (QI's) that defined the minimal requirements for PR. These quality indicators can be used to improve and develop strategies to improve PR. PR is crucial for people living with COPD and other lung diseases, preventing exacerbations and improving quality of life. In 2018-19, COPD was the leading cause of hospital admissions in Canada after childbirth⁵. The safe return to PR must be a priority in the post-peak COVID-19 era as a way to improve health outcomes of people with lung disease and the utilization of healthcare resources.

In 2015, only 155 healthcare facilities offered PR. Of these facilities, 60% were hospitals and 24% were in public health units.⁶ These therapies have been limited in many care settings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but access to the intervention was woefully low even before the pandemic arrived. Just 0.4% of Canadians experiencing COPD have access to PR.

It is clear that the pandemic has changed many aspects of our society, and accelerated the adoption of technology on many fronts. One positive development from the pandemic has been the fast adoption of telemedicine practices across the country and across disciplines to provide diagnostics and care at a distance. As Canadians have adapted to this model so have physicians, who are more increasingly comfortable engaging with patients online. The opportunity remains to improve the

¹ Kouri A, Gupta S, Yadollahi A, Ryan CM, Gershon AS, To T, Tarlo SM, Goldstein RS, Chapman KR, Chow CW, CHEST Reviews: Addressing reduced laboratory based pulmonary function testing during a pandemic, CHEST (2020), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chest.2020.06.065>

² Ibid.

³ DD Marciniuk, D Brooks, S Butcher, et al, Optimizing pulmonary rehabilitation in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease - practical issues: A Canadian Thoracic Society Clinical Practice Guideline, Can Respir J 2010; 17:159-168., doi: <https://doi.org/10.1155/2010/425975>

⁴ G Dechman, W Cheung, CJ Ryerson, et al, Quality indicators for pulmonary rehabilitation programs in Canada: A Canadian Thoracic Society expert working group report, [Canadian Journal of Respiratory, Critical Care, and Sleep Medicine](https://doi.org/10.1080/24745332.2019.1643610), 3:4, 199-209, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24745332.2019.1643610>

⁵ CIHI <https://www.cihi.ca/en/hospital-stays-in-canada>

⁶ Camp PG, Hernandez P, Bourbeau J, et al. Pulmonary rehabilitation in Canada: A report from the Canadian Thoracic Society COPD Clinical Assembly. Can Respir J. 2015;22(3):147-152. doi:10.1155/2015/369851

functionality and the use of telemedicine and nation-wide networks when it comes to lung conditions.

Notwithstanding clear barriers in broadband capacity for many communities, this development could lead to greater efficiencies and access to care over the years to come, and it is worth investing in its potential.

CTS Recommends:

- The government invest in the broader adoption and development of telemedicine networks across Canada in the thoracic field of healthcare.
- The government support the development and wide scale implementation of Pulmonary Rehabilitation programs that meet the recommended core QI's in order to standardize quality and improve access to this critical therapy.
- The government encourage the resumption of activities in PR therapy and in Pulmonary Function Testing facilities, with an emphasis on safety including appropriate PPE use, cleaning protocols and pre-visit viral testing.

Recommendation 3: Promotion of Vaccination Effectiveness and Vaccine Schedules.

A safe, effective vaccine is the best way to combat the COVID-19 virus and begin a post-pandemic recovery period. CTS is well positioned to provide leadership in the promotion and implementation of a national strategy due to the respiratory focus that is a critical part of severe COVID-19 cases.

It is very concerning that the COVID-19 pandemic arose at a time when vaccine hesitancy is on the rise. Misinformation and disinformation, spread largely online, is difficult to monitor and nearly impossible to remove. The federal government should consider ways to combat anti-vaccine information that has no scientific grounding and that limits the effectiveness of Canada's public health responses while putting our population at risk.

Respirologists know that patients with underlying conditions pose a high-risk for complications with COVID-19. The same is true for other illnesses that can be prevented with robust vaccination programs, including annual strains of influenza. Overall, government will save money on acute care when it invests proactively in enhanced vaccination promotion. This includes by providing adequate resources to healthcare providers to discuss vaccine schedules for their patients, especially for those in high-risk groups like those living with respiratory illnesses.

In a situation where the federal government and provincial governments are facing down unprecedented deficits from expanding social support programs, there should be a renewed emphasis on prevention in health care. This would include educating the public about the importance of trusting health experts.

We cannot be caught flat footed. There is no better time than now to begin investing in a plan for Canadians to get vaccinated.

CTS Recommends:

- The federal government invest in a national campaign to promote vaccination for COVID-19, and also consider promoting all types of vaccination.
- The federal government work directly with coalitions such as Immunize Canada (housed at the Canadian Public Health Association) to leverage the reach of participating member organizations.