

**Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance for Pre-Budget
Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Budget**

By: The Ontario Hospital Association

Recommendations of The Ontario Hospital Association

Recommendation 1: The Government of Canada increase funding for health research as a key to securing Canada's economic future and global leadership in research

Recommendation 2: The Government of Canada undertake a national discussion on strengthening our health care system and our ability to properly fund health and social services into the future

On behalf of Ontario's 141 public hospitals, the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) thanks the Government of Canada for its ongoing actions to help ensure Ontario hospitals are prepared to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. The OHA is the voice of Ontario's public hospitals and is privileged to serve and support hospitals and the health care system during this unprecedented time.

Unlike the experience seen in other jurisdictions, the acute care sector in Ontario has operated under relatively stable circumstances thanks to the collective leadership and action of front-line health care workers, health provider organizations, and the Governments of Canada and Ontario.

At the height of Wave One, the COVID-19 emergency showed us that the health system can achieve extraordinary things when we are all mobilized around a common cause. By putting the person receiving care at the centre of our work, we freed up hospital capacity and allowed the healthcare system to focus on what matters most – the safety and well-being of Canadians.

INCREASED FUNDING FOR HEALTH RESEARCH

As healthcare workers focus their fight on the front lines, in hospitals and communities, we have also witnessed the dedication of researchers, clinician-scientists, and teams from Ontario's research-intensive hospitals who have pivoted their research to defeat COVID-19.

To that end, we would again like to thank the federal government for the Canada Research Continuity Emergency Fund (CRCEF) investment. Securing these funds will help ensure the continued employment of thousands of researchers across Ontario and Canada during this challenging time.

We are also appreciative of the government's recognition and financial support of basic and clinical research that will be needed to overcome this public health crisis; research that is helping Canadians and ultimately the broader global community.

As we pass the peak of this first epidemic wave and as the economy cautiously reopens and non-COVID-19 research restarts, we are also turning our attention to challenges on the horizon for health research.

It has become clear that without sustained and increasing federal investment in health research our nation's innovation landscape will be severely incapacitated and be at significant risk. Through the beginning of this pandemic we came close to the precipice in the destabilization of hospital-based research in Ontario. Something that must not be repeated.

Ontario is home to global leaders in health research, our hospitals are engines of invention and discovery and make a profound difference to individuals, the health system, and the economy. We must protect these invaluable resources.

The OHA, therefore, supports HealthCareCAN's 2021 pre-budget submission. Including HealthCareCAN's call on the federal government to 'develop a clear vision for health research supported by a bolstered funding and policy framework to ensure Canada's academic healthcare organizations are ready to handle the challenges we see today and the unknowns of the future' and 'to invest in health research to the level equivalent of 1% (\$1.85B) of public spending on health.'

With support from the federal government we will be in a better position for research hospitals in Ontario and across Canada to rebound and re-engage our research partners to continue developing life-saving treatments.

Innovation comes from the courage and leadership to think differently about the way we deliver care and Ontario's hospitals are committed to harnessing our collective strengths to further advance patient care and a better health care system. The best care starts with the best research and for Canadian families, research represents brighter hope for the future for themselves and their loved ones.

STRENGTHENING OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, however, has revealed serious vulnerabilities in our system. In some cases, we saw tragic consequences as a result of a long-term care system that is isolated and not well-integrated with the rest of the healthcare system. It raised important questions about how we must prioritize support to our most vulnerable populations and those with mental health needs. It highlighted our lack of preparedness on a national level for this pandemic including the inability to provide adequate supplies of Personal Protective Equipment needed to safeguard front line workers. Healthcare providers and decision-makers have only begun to understand and reckon with these flaws because we are still in the midst of the crisis.

Even before the full magnitude of COVID-19's impact was realized, the OHA had been delivering a stark warning that years of flatlined hospital budgets, without significant expansion of capacity in other health and social sectors, were creating a very real risk of collapse in emergency department performance, timely access to care, and other critical hospital services.

The OHA believes a national discussion on how to strengthen and sustain health care must be had. We are therefore calling on the federal government to take steps to ensure the system can meet Canada's growing and changing healthcare needs, including support for the ongoing COVID-19 battle and plans to address future health crises.

Included in this national discussion, federal and provincial governments must work together to rethink our system of transfer payments to allow our nation to fund health and social services into the future. The pandemic has reminded Canadians what can be done when there is a sense of true crisis and urgency and we must not lose that momentum.

Time is of the essence as even now hospital occupancy levels are rising quickly. In Ontario, eighty percent of the stand-by capacity created in hospitals at the onset of the pandemic has now been filled. The number of patients waiting in hospitals for an alternate level of care (ALC), such as home care or long-term care, is now 4,900 - a figure nearing pre-pandemic rates. As Canadians, we must refuse to return to a system built on hallway health care and hospital occupancy levels well over 100 percent, especially amid a national health crisis.

COVID-19 has laid bare deep cracks in our healthcare system and health research funding. We know the core of the work will be done by clinicians, other frontline workers, and researchers but this work requires the support of the federal government. The OHA will continue to do our part by supporting the government in every way we can.

Thank you for your continued support during this extremely challenging time and in our shared mission to build a better health system

Sincerely,



Anthony Dale
President and CEO
Ontario Hospital Association