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## Public wants Ottawa to invest more in DI: survey

October 24, 2023



OTTAWA – Most Canadians support new federal investments in medical imaging to reduce wait times, according to a recent survey conducted by Nanos Research. Radiology is a crucial tool in decision making in all aspects of healthcare. Many Canadians will require medical imaging over their lifetime to help with the diagnosis and treatment of diseases such as cancer.

Patient advocate, Claire Snyman, speaks to the value of medical imaging in her care journey and the challenges that she faced in accessing medical imaging for the diagnosis and treatment of her condition in BC.

“As an individual diagnosed with a brain tumour, MRI’s and CT scans were a regular part of my care to help monitor my condition,” said Snyman. “When my brain tumour doubled in size, I became very ill and with limited access to medical imaging, I had to look for alternative ways to access imaging external to my provincial healthcare system, which saved my life.”

She added, “Not all patients are in a position to access privately funded services, nor should they have to. Timely access to quality medical imaging should be a right for Canadians and needs to be a priority for government.”

This situation is not exclusive to Claire but to many patients awaiting medical imaging across the country. The Canadian Association of Radiologists supports that Canada Health Act. Investments in human resources and equipment are needed to meet growing demand.

We are facing a crisis in radiology due to a shortage of medical radiation technologists (MRTs), sonographers and equipment. Canadians understand that this is a problem.

“We have been sounding the alarm about this dire workforce situation with governments across the country. Our research shows the same rates of MRTs considering leaving the profession across the country. This is a crisis and must be addressed immediately; the health and wellness of all Canadians is at stake,” said Irving Gold (pictured), CEO, CAMRT.

“Without new investments in Human Resources we worry that the quality of diagnostic imaging and the care provided will decline as a result of burnout among our members. Recruiting and retaining staff in the future is going to be even more daunting if we continue overstretching our care system,” said Susan Clarke, CEO, Sonography Canada.

In fact, 91% of Canadians support the government making investments specifically aimed at hiring and retaining more MRTs and sonographers. With a reported 10% vacancy rate for some of the most in demand MRTs across the country and limited workforce entering the system, we will not be able to meet the growing demand for imaging.

Furthermore, there is little hope in sight in the near future. When asked, 67% of Canadians indicated that neither they themselves or no one they know would be interested in becoming an MRT or sonographer. This statistic is alarming for patients and the radiology community.

Canadians also recognize the value of integrating innovative technologies in healthcare such as artificial Intelligence (AI) that can play a significant role in helping to improve access to medical imaging. 72% of Canadians would support the use of AI in radiology providing those images are being also analyzed by a human being.

However, Canadians do believe that oversight from the government is necessary in the implementation of AI. Over two in three Canadians feel that setting rules and regulations for the use of AI in radiology is necessary to protect the safety of Canadians. Further, 73% of Canadians believe investing in AI applications can help to reduce the backlog for medical imaging in Canada.

“Canadians understand that medical imaging is a critical part of our health infrastructure and that without investment in personnel, technology and equipment our system, and patients, are at risk,” said Dr. Ania Kielar, CAR president. “This survey reinforces what we have been saying.”

“Patients were already waiting an average of 50 to 82 days for CT scans and 89 days for MRI prior to the pandemic. This is 20 to 50 days longer than the recommended 30-day wait time. These delays are currently worse while at the same time, with radiologists, medical radiation technologists and sonographers alike experiencing high levels of burnout and no solution in sight, the situation will only deteriorate.”

Strategies must be implemented to recruit and retain technologists and sonographers across the country. There also needs to be consideration for implementing modern technologies that would enhance workflows in radiology departments and reduce the backlog for medical imaging (MI) in Canada. The federal government convenes a group of provincial planning leaders. They have an econometric model to forecast the supply of human resources, but they are not using it.

On October 19, radiologists visited Parliament Hill to advocate for federal leadership and further investment in medical imaging. To ensure that Canadian patients across the country have access to the care they deserve, the CAR in collaboration with the CAMRT and Sonography Canada is pushing for investments in the following areas:

- Implement a health human resources strategy, specifically aimed at hiring and retaining more medical radiation technologists (MRTs) and sonographers.
- Harness homegrown AI applications for the strategic prioritization of health human resources, technology, and infrastructure for medical imaging (MI) in Canada.
- Invest \$1 billion over three years for MI equipment to be distributed to the provinces on a per capita basis, with corresponding investments in the MRTs and sonographers required to deliver this imaging.
- Support the implementation of a national e-referrals program (clinical decision support) to equip referring health professionals with better access to MI guidelines, ensuring that patients receive the right imaging test at the right time.

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