



Highlights of Ontario's Health System Performance Report

November 2004

A Message from the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

In September 2000, Canada's Prime Minister and Premiers made a commitment to produce regular public reports on the performance of our health system. That commitment was made again in 2002 and 2004. This kind of reporting is one way that all provinces and territories are working together to renew the health system for all Canadians.

Ontario released its first report in 2002. I am pleased to bring you this second report. It describes how the health system has performed over the past few years and helps us understand which services help to make Ontarians healthier and which ones need improvement. While we are pleased to see that we are making progress, we know there is still much work to be done.

This is an extraordinary time for health care in Ontario. We have laid out a bold vision for Ontario's health system: healthier Ontarians in a healthier Ontario. We have a plan of action to get there by 2007.

Over the next three years, we will continue to pursue our important mission: to keep people healthy and care for those who are sick. We are committed to the task of building a better health system for you and your family, and ensuring that system is accountable for delivering quality results.

We will continue to report to you on how the system is performing. Future reports will demonstrate how our initiatives are making a difference in the health of all Ontarians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George Smitherman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "G" and "S".

George Smitherman

Minister

November 30, 2004



In 2004/05 Ontario will spend \$31.4 billion on healthcare services (including equipment and buildings), but is that investment leading to better health? Are we getting better at keeping people healthy and providing care when they are ill? What are we doing well? Where do we need to improve?

In September 2000, Canada's Prime Minister and Premiers promised to issue regular progress reports on the state of their health systems. Each province and territory agreed to collect information on the same indicators or measures so that jurisdictions could compare their results and learn from one another. The first reports were released in 2002.

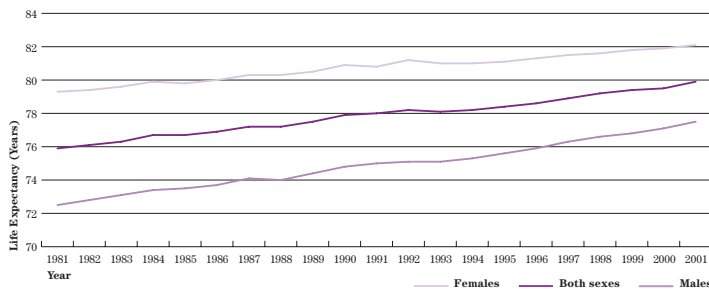
Ontario has now issued its second Health System Performance Report. Here are the highlights from that report.



1. How Healthy Are Ontarians Now?

One of the most common measures of a population's health is life expectancy – or the average number of years people are expected to live from the time they are born. The good news is that Ontarians are now living longer. For example, people born in 1981 could expect to live to about 76 years of age, while people born in the province in 2001 could expect to live to 80.

Ontario Life Expectancy at Birth by Sex - 1981 to 2001



Source: Statistics Canada, Vital Statistics Files, Birth and Death Databases and Demography Division.

While Ontarians are living longer, they may not live all those years in good health. For example, men born in 2001 will live an average of 77 years, but they will only enjoy good health for about 68 of those years. For the other nine to 10 years, they will likely have some health problems. Women born in 2001 can expect to live an average of about 82 years, but they will live only 70 of those years free of disease or disability.

The steady increase in life expectancy is due to Ontarians taking better care of themselves. It is also due to:

- dramatic improvements in treatments that allow people who have cancer, stroke, heart disease and other illnesses to live much longer
- immunization programs that protect people from preventable diseases
- efforts to make our environment as healthy as possible, such as keeping the water and air clean and passing by-laws that reduce our exposure to second-hand smoke.

Ontario's goal is to have people live long and healthy lives.

2. Are Ontarians Receiving Care When They Need It?

Are Ontarians receiving the health services they need when they need them? Ontario looked at whether people are having difficulty accessing a whole range of services from primary care to highly specialized treatments. Here is what we learned.

Ontarians Have Difficulty Obtaining Immediate Care for Minor Illnesses and Injuries

When Ontarians have easy access to primary care services, they are less likely to use other, more costly health services, and the system itself becomes more efficient. For example:

- people who have accurate health information are more likely to make healthy choices; they are also better able to look after minor health problems themselves and promote their own health.
- people who receive routine checkups and ongoing care for health problems are less likely to develop serious health problems.
- people who see a family physician for treatment of minor illnesses or injuries can avoid going to hospital emergency departments; the hospitals can then concentrate on what they do best: helping people with more urgent and complex health problems.

What is Primary Care?

Primary care is the care provided by family physicians, nurse practitioners and other healthcare providers that helps people maintain their health and prevent health emergencies. Primary care services include: health information and advice, annual checkups and health assessments, routine care for an ongoing illness (e.g., high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma), and immediate care for minor illnesses and injuries.

According to a 2003 Statistics Canada survey, about 15% of Ontarians had difficulty accessing routine or ongoing primary care, but many more – 25% – had trouble obtaining immediate care for a minor illness or injury. They reported problems getting appointments and having to wait too long for service.

These problems may be due to a shortage of physicians and other healthcare providers in some parts of the province and/or to the lack of clinics or doctors' offices open in the evenings or on weekends. In some cases, people may not know where to go for timely care. For example, many people with minor illnesses and injuries go to hospital emergency departments where they have to wait while people with more urgent life-threatening problems receive care.

Fewer Ontarians Are Using Home Care Services

Fewer Ontarians received publicly funded home care services in 2002/03 than in 2000/01. Given that the number of people age 75 and older – who are significant users of home care – increased, this likely means that people are finding it more difficult to obtain these services. When people who need home care cannot get that care, they may have to use more expensive services, such as emergency departments and other hospital or facility based services.

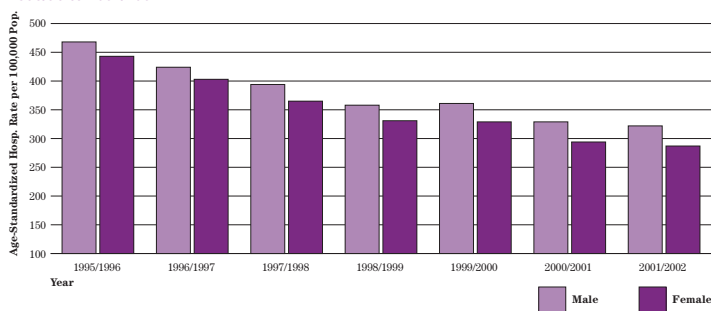
More Ontarians Are Using Community Services to Manage Long-Term Health Problems

When people with long-term health problems such as diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, alcohol dependence, and depression are able to obtain timely care in the community, their health improves and they are less likely to need costly hospital services. Over the past six years, hospitalization rates for these illnesses have dropped steadily. This is due to an increase in the number and quality of community services. It is now possible for Ontarians to receive care in the community that, in the past, was only available in hospital.

What Are Home Care Services? Who Uses Them?

Home care services include in-home nursing care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language pathology, social work, nutrition counselling, home-making, and assistance with daily activities such as bathing, dressing and grooming. These services are used by people with long-term or chronic diseases so they can continue to live at home and do not have to be admitted to hospital or move to a long-term care facility. They are also used by people recovering from short-term illnesses or surgery so they do not have to spend as much time in hospital.

Ontario Hospitalization Rate for Ambulatory Care Sensitive Conditions Over Time - 1995/96 to 2001/2002



Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information, Hospital Morbidity Database; Statistics Canada, Census.

Wait Times for Cardiac Bypass Surgery Have Improved

When people develop serious illnesses, such as cancer and heart disease, they want to be diagnosed and treated as quickly as possible. While timely care is important, Ontarians may have to wait to receive some specialized health services. The key challenge is to manage those wait times and make sure they do not have a negative effect on people's health. To manage wait times, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care must understand how long people are waiting for some services and how long they can wait safely depending on the seriousness of their condition.

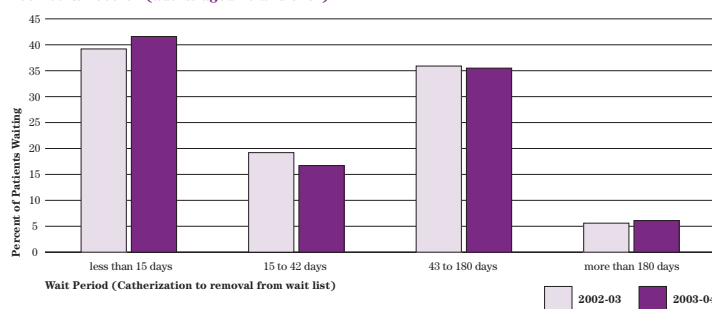
Over the past couple of years, Ontario has made some improvements in wait times. For example, between 2002/03 and 2003/04, the median wait time for cardiac bypass surgery (an open heart procedure that bypasses blocked arteries and allows more blood and oxygen to reach the heart muscle) dropped from 26 to 25 days, and over 40% of people on the wait list received their surgery within 15 days. But there is more to be done: about 40% of Ontarians are still waiting from 43 to 180 days or longer for heart surgery.

About Half of Breast and Prostate Cancer Patients Wait Six Weeks or Less to Start Radiation Therapy

Breast cancer and prostate cancer are the second and third most common cancers in Canada. The Canadian Cancer Society estimates that, in 2004, there will be 21,400 new cases of breast cancer and 20,100 new cases of prostate cancer in Canada.

In 2003/04, about 65% of the Ontarians referred for radiation therapy for breast cancer began their treatment within six weeks, and about 14% began treatment within two weeks. At the same time, 35% waited longer than six weeks to start receiving radiation. In patients with prostate cancer, fewer than half started therapy within six weeks (14% started treatment within two weeks), while 54% waited more than six weeks.

Distribution of Wait Times for Coronary Artery Bypass Grafts (CABG) Surgery in Ontario - 2002-03 & 2003-04 (adults aged 20 and over)



Source: Cardiac Care Network of Ontario



Access to radiation therapy is affected by the number of new cases, treatment practices, and the availability of health human resources and equipment. In 2003/04, wait times for radiation therapy were also affected by the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which forced two Toronto sites that provide a large portion of radiation therapy to delay treatments.

Ontarians Wait an Average of Three Weeks for Diagnostic Tests

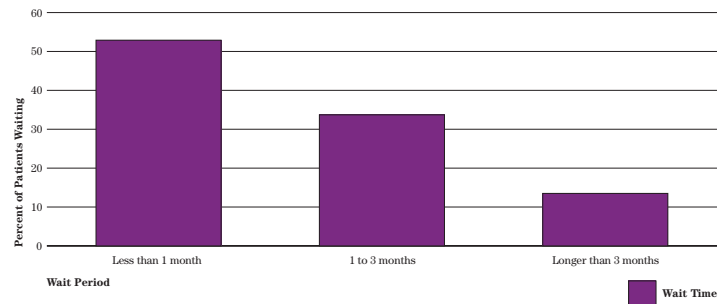
Access to radiation therapy and to other treatments is also affected by access to diagnostic tests, such as CT scans and magnetic resonance imaging (MRIs). Healthcare providers need diagnostic tests to diagnose disease and plan treatment.

In 2002/03, Ontarians reported waiting a median of three weeks for a diagnostic test. More than half received their diagnostic service in less than one month, 33.7% waited 1 to 3 months, and 13.5% waited longer than 3 months for a non-emergency diagnostic test.



Wait times for diagnostic tests are affected by the availability of diagnostic equipment and the technologists or radiologists who operate the equipment and interpret test results.

Self-Reported Distribution of Wait Times for Diagnostic Services in Ontario - 2003



Source: *Statistics Canada, Health Services Access Survey, 2003.*
 Note: Statistics Canada recommends that results for longer than three months be used with caution.



3. Are Ontarians Satisfied with the Care They Receive?

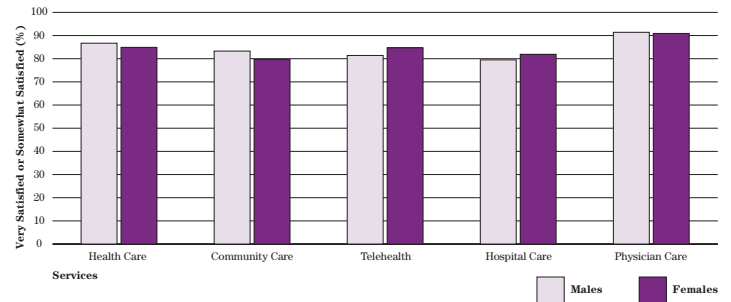
Ontario is committed to continuously improving the quality of healthcare. One way to measure quality is to ask patients how they feel about the care they receive when they receive it. Are Ontarians satisfied with their healthcare? Yes.

Ontarians Rank Physician Services and Telephone Health Services High

According to a 2003 Statistics Canada survey, most Ontarians (86%) are very or somewhat satisfied with the way their overall health services were provided. Men tend to be more satisfied than women, and people over age 65 are more positive about their health services than younger people.

Looking at different types of care, Ontarians are most satisfied with the way services were provided by physicians, followed by the services provided by the province's telephone health services.

Ontario Patient Satisfaction with Various Types of Health Services - 2003
Population 15 and older



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2003.



4. Is Ontario Making Progress in Preventing Life-Threatening Illnesses?

Each year, Ontario's health system spends millions of dollars to prevent or treat the illnesses that are the leading causes of death and disability in the province. Is that investment paying off? Are we making progress in the fight against heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity and influenza?

Fewer Ontarians are Dying from Heart Attacks or Strokes

Over the past 20 years, the rate of Ontarians dying from heart attacks or strokes has dropped dramatically. This may be due to: health promotion programs that promote healthier diets and more physical activity, the system's ability to detect problems early and better treatments.

More Ontarians are Developing Diabetes

Diabetes is on the rise. Over 5% of women and almost 6% of men in Ontario have diabetes, a long-term chronic condition that can lead to serious health problems, like high blood pressure, heart disease, blindness, kidney disease, and circulatory problems. People with diabetes are also 11 times more likely than other people to have a foot or limb amputated because of circulatory problems.

The increase in diabetes in Ontario is due to our aging population (people are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes as they get older) and high rates of obesity.

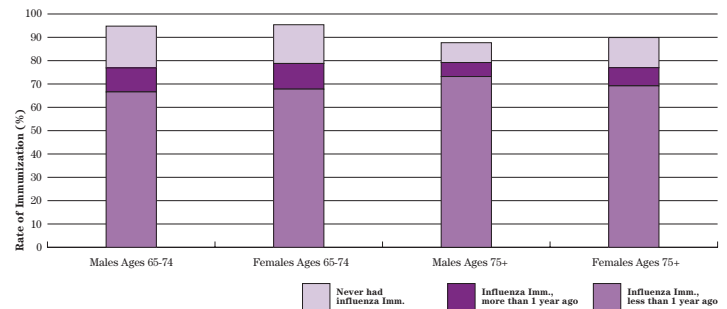
More Ontarians are Obese

About 16% of men and 14% of women in Ontario are obese, while almost 57% of men and 40% of women are at risk of becoming ill because of their weight. People who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop serious chronic diseases.

Older Ontarians are Protecting Themselves from the Flu

Each year, a significant number of older adults catch the flu and suffer from complications like pneumonia. Ontario is the only jurisdiction in Canada to offer free flu shots to all its citizens. This Universal Influenza Immunization Program is designed to reduce the illness and deaths caused by the flu. Older Ontarians are taking advantage of that program. Almost 7 out of every 10 people over age 65 were immunized in 2003.

Ontario Rate of Influenza Immunization for Males and Females Aged 65-74 and 75+ in 2003



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2003.



5. Are Ontarians Taking More Responsibility for Their Own Health?

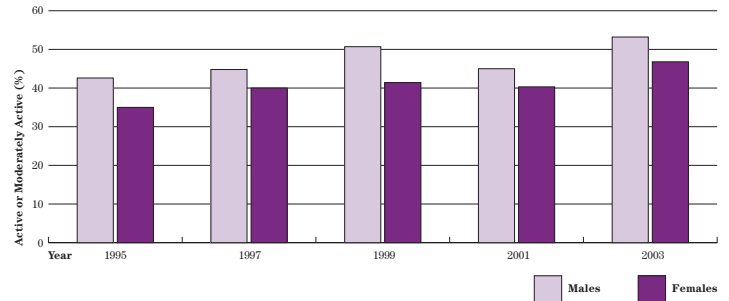
The health system can do a great deal to help prevent, detect and treat illness, but Ontarians themselves also play a key role. By taking responsibility for their health and making healthy choices, they can prevent or avoid many diseases. Most people are aware that not smoking, being physically active and eating a healthy diet can help them avoid serious illnesses. But are people acting on that information? There are some positive signs.

Ontarians are More Physically Active

Regular physical activity strengthens the heart, muscles, bones and joints. People who are active are less likely to suffer from depression, stress or obesity. If just 10% of Ontarians became more active, the province would save about \$150 million each year in healthcare costs.

The good news is that, over the past nine years, Ontarians have become more physically active. About 53% of males and 47% of females over age 12 report now being active or moderately active. But more must still be done to encourage the other half of our population to get moving.

Ontario Males and Females Physically Active or Moderately Active Over Time - Ages 12 and Over



Source: *Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2003, 2000/01; National Population Health Survey, 1994/95 - 1998/99.*

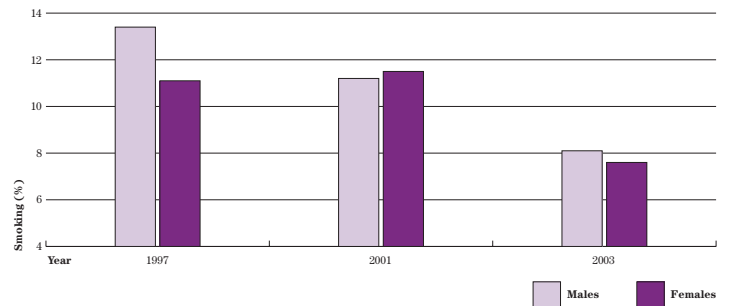
Note: Readers should be cautious in interpreting changes over time because of change in the method of data collection.

Fewer Teenagers Are Smoking

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care estimates that, each year, 16,000 Ontarians die prematurely because of smoking. The province spends more than \$1 billion annually treating diseases caused by smoking. The best way to prevent the harm caused by tobacco is to keep people from starting to smoke. Because 90% of adult smokers started smoking before they were 18, Ontario's prevention programs focus on teenagers and these programs appear to be working.

Over the past seven years, the number of Ontario teenagers who smoke has dropped significantly.

Prevalence of Daily Smoking by Youth (Ages 12-19) in Ontario over Time



Source: *Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey 2000/01 and 2003, National Population Health Survey 1994/95 to 1998/99.*

This decline in smoking among teenagers indicates that recent efforts to prevent youth from starting to smoke are working. Lower teenage smoking rates will likely result in fewer adult smokers in the future. This will ultimately reduce smoking related disease and deaths in Ontario.

What's Next? Healthier Ontarians in a Healthier Ontario

Over the past two years, our health system has made some progress. Ontarians are living longer and are generally satisfied with the services they receive. We continue to see a drop in the rate of people dying from heart attacks and strokes, and there are signs that Ontarians are taking more responsibility for their own health.

But there is still a great deal to do. Ontarians are not always getting the care they need when they need it. We have to improve access to health services and take steps to deal with health threats, such as diabetes and obesity.

The Government of Ontario has laid out a simple bold vision for Ontario's health system: *healthier Ontarians in a healthier Ontario*. We will achieve this vision by providing a sustainable, publicly funded health system where Ontarians' access to service depends on need and not on ability to pay.

Individuals, providers, and governments have a shared responsibility for our health. We must work together to create a health system that helps people stay healthy and delivers high-quality healthcare at a price we can afford.

What Government Will Do ...

Over the next four years, we will put more dollars towards:

- primary healthcare, home care, and long-term care;
- preventing and managing chronic diseases and enhancing public health.

We will reduce wait times for key services, including cataract surgery, hip and knee total joint replacements, certain cancer services, certain cardiac services and MRIs/CT tests. We will increase the number of doctors and nurses, and develop more family health teams that provide care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We will increase the number of children who are immunized against chicken pox, meningitis and pneumonia. We will take steps to help Ontarians fight obesity, be more active and improve their health. We will also work to make sure the health system “lives within its means” and makes efficient use of its resources.

What Ontarians Can Do ...

You can take six steps that will help you and your family live longer, healthier lives – and reduce the risk of developing chronic or life-threatening illnesses:

- stop smoking or do not smoke
- eat healthy foods
- be more physically active
- keep your weight within a healthy range
- take advantage of immunization programs
- make good use of our health services.

Go to hospital emergency departments only when you have an urgent problem. For minor illnesses and injuries, call Telehealth Ontario or contact a primary healthcare provider.

To get a copy of the full report, call INFOLine at 1-877-234-4343 or TTY: 1-800-387-5559, or visit our website at www.health.gov.on.ca.

For more information on how to improve your health, visit www.healthyonario.com.

Disponible en français. Pour obtenir de plus amples renseignements, appelez la ligne INFO, 1 877 234-4343 ATS : 1 800 387-5559.

www.health.gov.on.ca

