



Statement on Ontario's 2024/2025 Budget

The Canadian Cancer Survivor Network (CCSN) has reviewed the Ontario 2024/2025 budget with a focus on its potential impact on cancer care. While we are encouraged by investments in areas like primary care and workforce development, we regrettably note the absence of any specific cancer care initiatives.

CCSN applauds the Government of Ontario's commitment to increasing access to primary care and strengthening the healthcare workforce. These investments are essential for ensuring timely diagnoses, improved care coordination, and better overall health outcomes for all Ontarians, including cancer survivors.

Strengthening the Healthcare Workforce for Improved Cancer Care

The budget allocates \$743 million to address the urgent healthcare staffing needs in the province and to prepare for the future. A significant portion of this investment focuses on increasing nursing enrolment. CCSN recommends that the government also prioritize the education, retention, and employment of clinical nurse specialists (CNS). Research published in the *European Journal of Cancer Care* states that cancer patients who reported being given access to a CNS reported better experiences with involvement in treatment decisions, care coordination, treatment with more respect and dignity, and overall care experience.ⁱ

A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* indicated that hospitals with higher nurse-to-patient ratios in oncology units experienced lower rates of patient mortality and complications.ⁱⁱ CCSN urges the government to allocate a portion of the new healthcare professionals to oncology departments or cancer care programs. This will ensure timely access to nurses for treatment, survivorship care, and symptom management, ultimately improving the quality of life for cancer survivors in Ontario.

Enhancing Access to Primary Care for Early Detection and Improved Outcomes

The budget's focus on expanding access to primary care teams, with an additional \$546 million invested over three years, aligns perfectly with CCSN's goals. We strongly support this investment for its potential to significantly improve early detection and long-term management of chronic conditions for cancer survivors.

Regular check-ups facilitated by primary care physicians (PCPs) are crucial for early detection of cancer. During these visits, PCPs can perform routine screenings for various cancers, such as breast or colon cancer, and identify potential risk factors. Early detection allows for timely intervention and treatment, significantly increasing the chances of successful outcomes. A study published by the Canadian Cancer Society highlights that five-year net survival rates for breast

cancer in women were almost 100% for Stage I but fell to 23% for Stage IV.ⁱⁱⁱ This demonstrates the undeniable impact of early detection on cancer survival. By investing in expanding primary care access, the government empowers individuals to receive regular check-ups and effective screening programs, ultimately improving their chances of a successful cancer outcome.

Leveraging Technology Investments for Enhanced Cancer Care

The Ontario budget outlines the creation of a \$12 million Health Technology Accelerator Fund (HTAF) to support healthcare providers in adopting innovative technologies that improve patient care. While the initial budget may be limited, the HTAF represents a promising opportunity to advance cancer care in Ontario. We acknowledge the government's desire to cultivate a broader healthcare technology ecosystem. However, we also recognize the critical need to prioritize technologies with a demonstrable impact on cancer care outcomes.

CCSN urges the government to include a transparent selection process for HTAF funding that prioritizes technologies with a demonstrable impact on cancer care. More specifically, this process should consider technologies that:

- **Focus on Early Detection and Intervention:**
 - Technologies that improve cancer screening accuracy or facilitate early diagnosis can significantly improve patient prognoses.
 - Solutions enabling remote monitoring of cancer patients can allow for early intervention and better management of potential complications.
- **Improve Treatment Efficacy and Reduce Side Effects:**
 - Technologies supporting personalized medicine approaches, which tailor treatments based on individual patient characteristics, can lead to more effective therapies.
 - Solutions that minimize treatment side effects for cancer patients can improve their overall well-being and quality of life.
- **Enhance Patient Experience and Survivorship Care:**
 - Technologies improving patient communication with healthcare professionals can foster a more collaborative and informed treatment journey.
 - Digital tools that empower cancer survivors to manage medication or track symptoms can promote self-care and improve long-term well-being.

Notes

ⁱ Saleh A. Alessy et al., “Being Assigned a Clinical Nurse Specialist Is Associated with Better Experiences of Cancer Care: English Population-Based Study Using the Linked National Cancer Patient Experience Survey and Cancer Registration Dataset,” *European Journal of Cancer Care* 30, no. 6 (July 26, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecc.13490>.

ⁱⁱ Linda H. Aiken et al., “Hospital Nurse Staffing and Patient Mortality, Nurse Burnout, and Job Dissatisfaction,” *JAMA* 288, no. 16 (October 23, 2002): 1987, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.288.16.1987>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Canadian Cancer Statistics Advisory Committee et al., “Canadian Cancer Statistics, 2023” (Toronto, ON: Canadian Cancer Society, November 2023), https://cdn.cancer.ca/-/media/files/research/cancer-statistics/2023-statistics/2023_PDF_EN.pdf.