

# CANCER CAN'T WAIT:

## AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL CANADIAN GOVERNMENT AND HEALTHCARE DECISION-MAKERS

Half of all Canadians will become cancer patients. We need a plan for their care during the next national crisis.

One in two Canadians is expected to develop cancer in their lifetime. Early detection and treatment can help ensure the best outcomes.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has led to the postponement and cancellation of “non-essential” clinical procedures, including appointments related to cancer screening, diagnosis, testing and treatment. Delayed access to cancer care puts people in jeopardy and gives their cancer time to progress undetected. Researchers warn many will die from cancer due to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ultimately, COVID-19 has led to a second, equally alarming public health crisis: the disruption of cancer care in Canada.

### COVID-19 has resulted in significant delays in care – for patients and those awaiting diagnosis

The Canadian Cancer Survivor Network (CCSN) recently conducted its second Leger survey on the disruption of cancer care in Canada during the pandemic. We learned our community shares deep concerns about the Canadian healthcare system's ability to serve cancer patients during a crisis.

Respondents reported it took on average 34 days to reschedule cancelled or postponed in-person appointments, and 52 days to reschedule surgery and other procedures. Of those who experienced delays, 36 per cent still do not have a rescheduled appointment time, and 46 per cent still do not have a rescheduled surgery or procedure time.

### Delayed care can have impacts on both physical and mental health

Concerns about receiving adequate cancer care are fueling anxieties among caregivers and patients. Seventy-two per cent of respondents experienced major impacts on their mental and emotional health. Cancer patients are more concerned than ever about their ability to receive care in a hospital or emergency room setting.

Physical health can also be impacted by delays. Early diagnosis and treatment are key to better patient outcomes. That's why it's important for those with cancer or suspected cancer to re-engage with the healthcare system for regular screenings, follow-up appointments, and treatments as needed.

### Virtual care is only a partial solution

The widespread adoption of virtual care may pave the way for a more modernized healthcare system, equipped with digital tools to help clinicians provide distanced support when patients don't require an in-person visit. At the same time, in-person care will always be important and is often indispensable. Our survey found that although patients and caregivers are satisfied with virtual consultations, they prefer in-person care. To minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission, healthcare professionals are taking steps to ensure clean and safe pathways are available for patients who need access to in-person services.

### Canadians cannot afford to let this happen again.

Because cancer affects everyone's life, all Canadians will benefit from a resilient healthcare system. Let's work together to ensure that a lack of adequate planning will never again lead to the sidelining of cancer care.

It is critical to plan for continued cancer care during future pandemics as well as other crises that may affect Canada, including civil unrest, environmental disasters or economic hardships. Safe and timely access to essential cancer care — including diagnostics, testing and treatment — must remain a top priority across Canada during any crisis.

As they plan for the future, we're urging decision-makers to remember the more than 225,800 Canadians who receive a cancer diagnosis each year.

Our preparations can't wait. Cancer can't be delayed or postponed. We have no way of knowing the timing or nature of Canada's next major crisis. But we do know our responsibility to help tomorrow's patients starts today.

Cancer can't wait.

**Jackie Manthorne**

President and CEO  
Canadian Cancer Survivor Network

[info@survivornet.ca](mailto:info@survivornet.ca)  
[www.survivornet.ca](http://www.survivornet.ca)

Supported by educational grants from Canada's research-based pharmaceutical companies.

**55%**

of Canadian cancer patients, caregivers and those awaiting confirmation of a cancer diagnosis have had appointments, tests, and treatment postponed or cancelled

**72%**

of respondents to our survey said delays have had a major impact on their mental and emotional health.

### RESEARCHERS FOUND THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON MORTALITY

if treatments are delayed for these cancers:

- Bladder
- Breast
- Colon
- Rectum
- Lung
- Cervix
- Head & Neck