

REGISTERED NURSES: ON THE FRONT LINES OF WAIT TIMES – *MOVING FORWARD*

Executive Summary

Canadians are waiting too long for health-care services. Lengthy emergency department wait times and frequent delays in accessing primary, long-term and continuing care services; diagnostics; specialists; surgeries – these are all symptoms of a health system that desperately needs rebalancing.

Numerous factors contribute to the problem of wait times. A true solution can come only through cumulative changes that coalesce to put patients, families and communities at the heart of our health system – a system that's optimized to deliver the timely, quality care Canadians need and deserve.

This report highlights how registered nurses (RN) are reducing or managing wait times across the country – and across the continuum of care. Nurses are making real differences with respect to economic and human costs associated with waiting for health care.



CANADIAN
NURSES
ASSOCIATION

WHAT ARE NURSES **DOING** ABOUT WAIT TIMES?

RNs in Canada are reducing wait times by *providing quality care and better health outcomes.*

Nursing care that reduces the length of hospital stay is a critical element of managing wait times. Every day, RNs use their knowledge, skills and judgment to prevent complications and improve recovery for patients in hospitals. The care they provide can safely shorten the length of time people stay in hospital, meaning that others who are awaiting admission can receive care sooner.

RNs in Canada are improving wait times by *providing more entry points in the health system and improving patient experiences related to waiting.*

RNs are implementing creative health-care delivery models, enhanced nursing roles and innovative programs in a variety of settings. They are coming up with ways to use existing resources more effectively by expanding their roles and moving into new practice areas. Together, their efforts are increasing the numbers of individuals accessing care.

RNs in Canada are reducing wait times by *promoting better health.*

Improving the health of Canadians – especially vulnerable populations – involves a concerted and sustained effort. Nurses work in a variety of settings to help individuals and families adopt healthy lifestyle choices and behaviours throughout their lives. Nurses provide health education and coaching and reinforce health promotion strategies during every interaction across the continuum of care. Increasing the reach of nurses into the community is key to improving the health of all Canadians.

RNs in Canada are reducing wait times by *preventing and managing chronic diseases.*

RNs are helping patients to take control of their chronic health problems. Better self-management of these conditions will improve and prolong patients' quality of life and reduce the need for episodic or premature hospital admissions. The role of nurses in building capacity in self-care is improving patients' participation in their health and well-being and reducing the number of unnecessary and costly admissions and readmissions to hospital.

RNs in Canada are reducing wait times by *collaborating as members of interprofessional teams.*

RNs are teaming up with other health-care professionals to provide more comprehensive and holistic care. In a collaborative model, nurses use their skills to complement the work of physicians and other members of the health-care team. Because team members make fuller use of their individual competencies, the nurse's time can be used more efficiently and effectively.

RNs in Canada are reducing wait times by *embracing technology.*

The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) offers a promising solution to the wait times issue. Nurses are using telehealth, electronic health records (EHRs), electronic documentation, decision support systems and other technologies to carry out clinical, education, administrative, research and other health system initiatives. These approaches have the potential to revolutionize Canada's health system. By participating in the development of technology and optimizing its adoption in clinical practice, nurses will continue to increase productivity and provide high-quality care.

NURSES **CAN DO MORE TO** REDUCE AND MANAGE WAIT TIMES

RNs in established roles and nurses in advanced practice roles are among those leading the way to bring about effective health system change. However, more needs to be done. For instance, the federal government needs to move quickly to develop and implement policies that enable nurse practitioners to practise to their fullest potential. Eliminating these kinds of legislative barriers will improve the range of care available to Canadians and further reduce wait times.

To find out more about how nurses are working to reduce and manage wait times, read the full report, *Registered Nurses: On the Front Lines of Wait Times – Moving Forward*, at www.cna-aiic.ca.

The problem of wait times results from a series of inefficiencies that exist throughout many parts of the health system. A true solution requires a comprehensive, coordinated response on several fronts.

“The more work we can do to promote and maintain health, the further we’ll get in reducing wait times.”

– Katie Dilworth

KEY MESSAGES

Canadians deserve better access to health-care services. They are waiting too long for an appointment to see a specialist or schedule surgery, for diagnostic confirmation and/or treatment for chronic pain or cancer, for discharge from a hospital to home or a long-term or continuing care facility, or for transfer from the emergency department (ED) to a hospital bed. They deserve better.

Canada’s health system is built on a structure that has seen the hospital become the centre of health care. A system that is focused on providing acute-care services has left many Canadians waiting in line for primary and specialist care, preventive care, community and home care, and a number of other services that help people to maintain or improve their health and well-being.

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) and its members advocate for a reformed health system that places Canadians *at the centre* of care – a system that provides access to the most appropriate health-care providers, when and where they are needed. RNs, nurse practitioners (NP), family physicians, mental health therapists, dietitians, physiotherapists, pharmacists and other health professionals have a unique role to play in optimizing a person’s health.

RNs understand that while waiting for care, patients and their families often endure hardships of a psychological, socio-economic and/or physical nature. The human costs of waiting are many.

RNs are stepping forward with cost-effective and proactive solutions for reducing and managing wait times across the health system and across the

continuum of care. These solutions include promoting better health, providing more entry points in the health system, collaborating as members of interprofessional teams, preventing and managing chronic disease, and providing quality care that improves health outcomes.

- When RNs provide care, complications are minimized, patients are discharged earlier and new patients receive care sooner.
- When RNs use their full range of competencies, practise in new areas and work in expanded roles, they provide more entry points in the health system – which means that more patients can receive care.
- As trusted health professionals, RNs are well-positioned to influence healthier lifestyle choices and behaviours that result in a reduced demand for health services.
- When RNs are directly involved in the care of people with chronic health problems, these individuals develop a greater capacity to manage their disease, resulting in reduced hospital admissions and a lower likelihood of unnecessary readmissions.

- When RNs work in interprofessional teams with physicians and other health-care professionals, more individuals and families have greater access to a cadre of clinicians with a broad range of skills and expertise. Interprofessional teams offer a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to patient care.
- When RNs participate in the development and implementation of technology, they are able to:
 - improve system efficiencies and productivity;
 - increase the time they spend on direct care;
 - apply evidence more readily into their practice;
 - increase capacity to access consultations, information, advice and coaching for patients 24 hours a day, seven days a week; and
 - improve access to care for Canadians residing in rural and remote locations.

“Canada’s emergency nurses are helping to sound the alarm about the real causes of emergency department overcrowding, such as inefficiencies in having inpatients moved through the rest of the hospital system.”

– Landon James

Government support for innovative and evidence-informed health-care delivery models that provide expanded roles for nurses will improve productivity, system responsiveness and patient access. The federal government needs to move quickly to develop and implement policy that enables NPs to practise to their fullest potential. Policy and funding should be targeted to reducing barriers to interprofessional collaborative practice and expanding access to primary care and other community-based services.

The problem of wait times results from a series of inefficiencies that exist throughout many parts of the health system. A true solution requires a comprehensive, coordinated response on several fronts.

WE ARE INTERESTED IN HEARING FROM YOU.

To share your stories or specific examples of how nurses are working to reduce and manage wait times, please contact Don Wildfong, nurse consultant, at dwildfong@cna-aiic.ca.