



WRITTEN SUBMISSION FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE'S
PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION
2024



Canadian
Physiotherapy
Association

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INTRODUCTION

Solving Canada's Healthcare Crisis

The recommendations outlined by the Canadian Physiotherapy Association in this pre-Budget submission identify pragmatic solutions that draw on the existing skillset and talent of Canada's healthcare workers to directly alleviate many of the burdens in Canada's healthcare system. As physiotherapy is embedded into the *Canada Health Act*, the profession is well-positioned to address barriers to care and to improve system capacity. Utilizing physiotherapy skills and finding more avenues in which they can contribute provides turnkey solutions and physiotherapy professionals are ready to embrace this opportunity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Expand the Canada Student Financial Assistance (CSFA) Program to Include Physiotherapists
- 2** Enable Physiotherapists to Work to Their Full Scope of Practice

RECOMMENDATION 1

Expanding Student Aid

Canada needs more healthcare workers, period.

Physiotherapists per 1,000 population, OECD countries, 2021

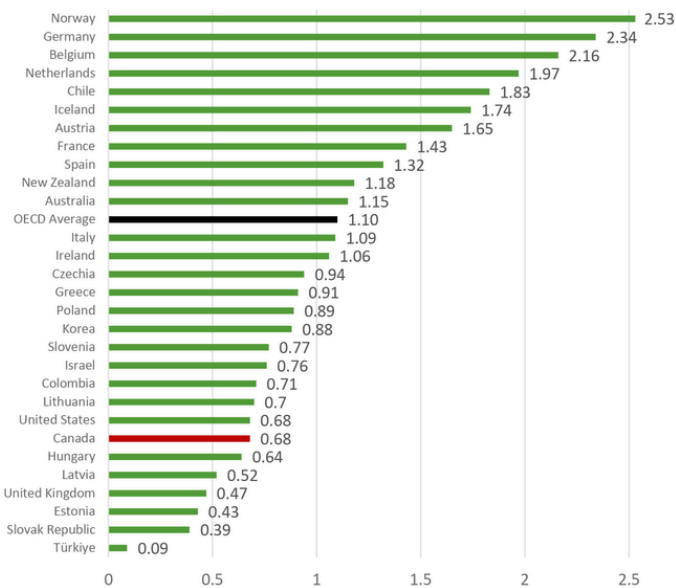


Chart source: OECD

In Canada, the number of physiotherapists per capita is already well-below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average. What's more, Canada needs more healthcare workers in all areas of the country, not just in cities and suburbs. Physiotherapy is facing the same acute crisis in health human resources (HHR) as other healthcare professions, leading to shortages in rural and remote communities. Funding for direct improvements in HHR for primary care have seen traction; in

2020, approximately 5,500 doctors and nurses participated in the loan forgiveness program, and with additional investments made in the last budget, the program scope will be expanded to serve more communities across this country[1]. While the government has taken these notable steps over the past year to try and increase the number and distribution of healthcare workers in Canada, the fact remains that further actions can be taken to support a healthcare system that is in crisis *now*.

Compounding the issue is Canada's large geographic size and the recognition by patients and providers that primary care teams should have the appropriate mix of interprofessional healthcare providers. Studies show this is not only a preferred model of care for patients and providers[2],[3], but that it can improve access to and quality of care[4]. This means that more healthcare workers such as physiotherapists are needed as part of primary care teams and in more parts of the country than ever before. While physiotherapy as a profession is growing faster than other healthcare professions, it is far behind other advanced economies.



Smaller and more rural and remote communities often do not have the availability or accessibility of physiotherapy services. We strongly encourage the expansion of the CSFA to include physiotherapy students, as this expertise supports a team-based care approach across Canada.

SYLVAIN BROUSSEAU
President, Canadian Nurses Association

The CPA welcomes the expansion of the Canada Student Financial Assistance program in the 2023 Budget to help more physicians and nurses work in underserved and remote communities. Physiotherapy graduates should be the natural choice for the program expansion in 2024 as this is a very small investment by the federal government through which considerable benefits can be realized for rural and remote communities.

The expansion has the potential to unleash a threefold benefit; attracting more Canadians to the physiotherapy profession by reducing the financial barriers to education, increasing health service access and delivery in communities that have the barrier of long travel times to access care, and enhancing the recruitment of underrepresented students from rural communities where retention is a persistent challenge^[5].

RECOMMENDATION 2

Full Scope for Physiotherapy Professionals

Physiotherapists face arbitrary, outdated barriers to helping their patients. They have the ability and skill to support a much broader range of healthcare solutions and patients, alleviating the burden on other primary care providers like nurses and physicians[6].

Physiotherapists have a broad scope of practice already recognized under regulation, but their breadth of skills is not fully and consistently recognized across the country. Full scope optimization is yet to be realized in all jurisdictions[7],[8].



With the ongoing surgical backlog, the inclusion of physiotherapy students within the CSFA program would not only expedite patient recovery and care but also allow us to tap into and optimize their scope of practice in rural and remote communities across Canada.

DR. OLUFEMI AYENI
President-Elect, Canadian Orthopaedic Association

The physiotherapy profession acknowledges that legislated scope does not map to the full scope potential for physiotherapy across each province and territory. For example, in Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Quebec (with limits), physiotherapists can order diagnostic imaging such as X-rays and ultrasounds; Alberta and Quebec physiotherapists are also found in emergency rooms. In other provinces, physiotherapists do not have the scope for either. The existing discrepancies are based only on historical precedent, not in evidence. Internationally, models that see physiotherapists working in expanded, and standardized scopes have seen success in reduced healthcare expenditures, fewer repeat referrals, improved patient satisfaction and improved surgical wait times[9].

Granting the ability for physiotherapists to practice to their full scope immediately would begin reducing pressure on other healthcare providers while maximizing system capacity.

For example, when Canadians can directly access a physiotherapist without a physician referral for musculoskeletal conditions, outcomes show similar reductions in pain, improved function and quality of life, reduced use of other health system resources, and lower healthcare costs^{[10],[11]}.

Beyond legislated scope, barriers to optimized scope also exist in payment models and access pathways. A broader scope of practice will also allow for faster access to care for patients, as well as faster referrals and diagnostic testing, allowing patients to access the right type of care more quickly. This extends beyond primary healthcare facilities like hospitals and into other care settings such long-term care facilities, community health clinics and outpatient facilities.

About the Canadian Physiotherapy Association

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association represents physiotherapy professionals, including registered physiotherapists, physiotherapist assistants, physiotherapy technologists and students across Canada. Physiotherapy professionals provide essential expertise, rehabilitative care, and treatment, enabling Canadians to live well and actively participate in all facets of their lives.

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