

Charting the Future of Physiotherapy Care in Canada: **Public Input on Access, Standards & Scope**



Canadian
Physiotherapy
Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY >>>

A national survey of **1,513 members of the public** was conducted in early December 2024. It examined public expectations for the future of physiotherapy care in Canada, including the issues of access, knowledge and understanding of physiotherapy care, scope of practice expansion, and national standards.

The key findings and implications are as follows.

- 1** The public's firsthand experience with physiotherapy care, combined with their understanding of the profession and the trust they place in its practitioners, equip them to contribute meaningfully to discussions about the future of physiotherapy care in Canada.
- 2** The future of physiotherapy care will unfold within a healthcare system that is perceived to be struggling.
- 3** The vast majority of physiotherapy care recipients report being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their care.
- 4** Accessing physiotherapy care is a significant challenge for millions of Canadians, especially for persons with disabilities.
- 5** There is strong and consistent public support for expanding the scope of practice for physiotherapy professionals. Receptivity may be influenced by the very positive public perception of similar expansions for nurses and pharmacists.

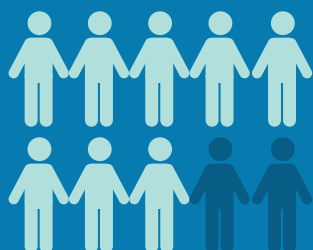
PERCEPTIONS OF THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM >>>

8 in 10 Canadians believe physiotherapists “play an important role in improving Canadians’ health” and view physiotherapy as providing a broad range of benefits (e.g., improving mobility/function, reducing reliance on pain medication).

44% of Canadians say that healthcare in their community is getting worse.

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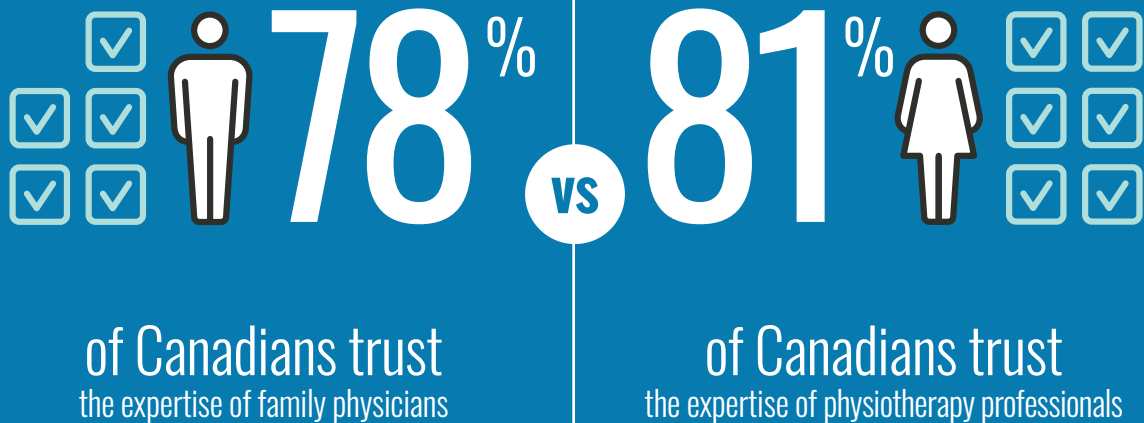
“ *Allowing physiotherapy professionals additional healthcare services would **take some of the burden off other sectors** of the health-care services.* ”

- 60 year old man in Ontario

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF PHYSIOTHERAPY CARE >>>

The public has a relatively good understanding of what physiotherapists do for patients, on par with their understanding of what registered nurses do.

78% trust the expertise of family physicians, while **81% trust** the expertise of physiotherapy professionals.



PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES AND BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Most Canadians (61%) have received physiotherapy care (in Canada), including **73% among persons with disabilities**.


26% say that in the past 10 years they have wanted or needed to access physiotherapy care but did not receive it. This translates into millions of Canadians. The proportion of persons with disabilities that have gone without physiotherapy care is **much higher, at 43%**.

Inability to pay out-of-pocket is by far the top reason why Canadians have not accessed physiotherapy care when they **wanted or needed it (51%)**, followed by their provincial health plan **not covering it (35%)**.

Only 42% of Canadians express satisfaction with their ability to afford physiotherapy.


84% of Canadians believe provinces/territories should cover the cost of physiotherapy in the same way as doctor's visits are covered.

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PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS AROUND THE FUTURE OF PHYSIOTHERAPY >>>

Canadians believe expanding the scope of physiotherapy practice would be widely beneficial, including to the sustainability of the health-care system.

82% of Canadians believe allowing physiotherapy professionals to provide additional health services would be a “good idea,” with views consistent across provinces.

Most Canadians believe it is important that physiotherapy professionals be allowed to provide a broad range of specific services across Canada, with the ability to order diagnostic imaging (e.g., X-rays, MRIs) and refer patients to a specialist (e.g., orthopedic surgeon) at the top of the list.

83% of Canadians believe that governments should put more funding into preventative care and rehabilitation to take pressure of physicians, nurses, and emergency rooms.

Even higher agreement is found with **persons with disabilities (91%)** and people who have **received physiotherapy before (88%)**

82% say it is “important” to have national standards across Canada so that the same physiotherapy services and level of care can be provided regardless of where one lives.


“*They are the ones that are actually working on a problem area on your body, therefore if **they can request additional information and support** for you, they can take that additional task off of family doctors and be able to see more patients.*”

- 55-year-old woman in British Columbia

PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS AROUND THE FUTURE OF PHYSIOTHERAPY CONTINUED>>>

“ *If the therapist is the one working on specific issues such as a shoulder/rotator cuff problem, why should you have to go back to a doctor to get an X-ray/imaging for the therapist to continue their work? **Don't waste the doctor's time.*** ”

- 38-year-old man in Ontario

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“ *It could **reduce the necessity of going back and forth** between specialists and family doctors.* ”


- 19-year-old man in Quebec

EMPLOYER BENEFITS AND ACCESSING PHYSIOTHERAPY

Only 61% of Canadians have employer-provided health insurance.

15% of Canadians do not know if their employer-provided health insurance covers physiotherapy.

A third of respondents with employer-provided physiotherapy coverage say it only, at best, partially meets their needs.

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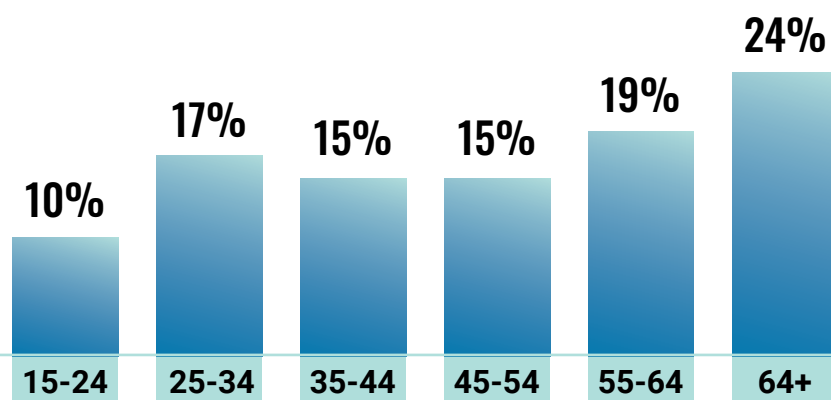
“*Physiotherapists are working hands-on with patients day to day and know firsthand what symptoms are and what next steps should be taken.*”

- 31-year-old man in Nova Scotia

RESPONDENT PROFILE (WEIGHTED DATA) >>>

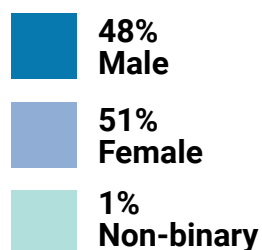
Age

What is your current age?



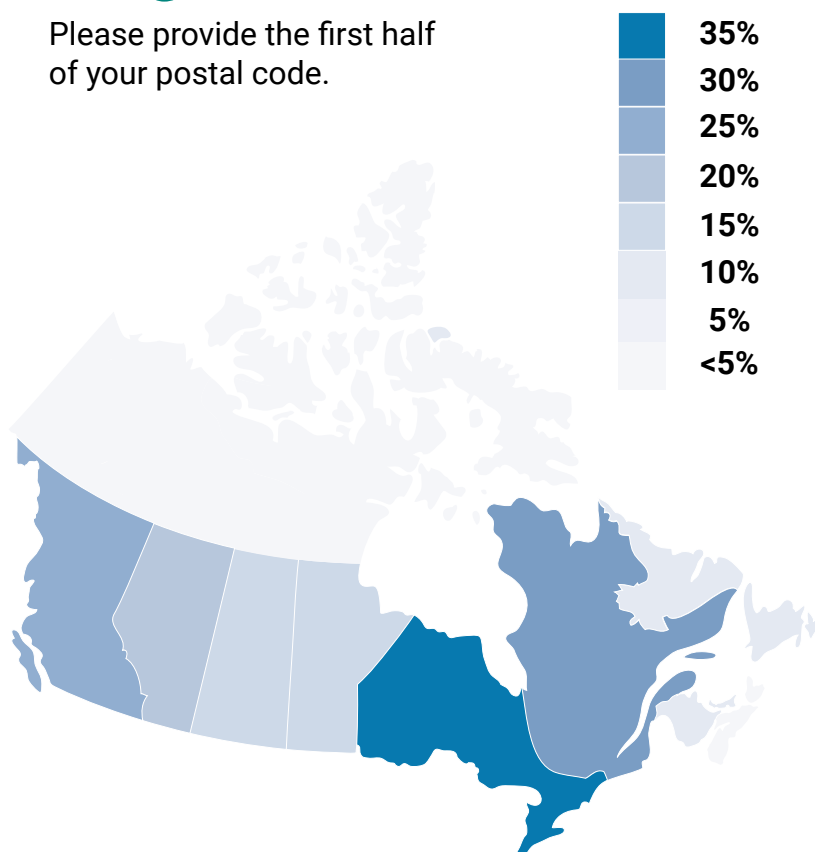
Gender

What is your gender?



Region

Please provide the first half of your postal code.



METHODOLOGY >>>

The survey was designed by the Hill & Knowlton research team in consultation with the CPA's research and subject matter experts, and the sampling consisted of randomly selected members of Leger's LEO research panel*.

Post-stratification weights were applied to the sample based on 2021 census population figures to ensure representation by province, age, and gender.

An associated margin of error for a probability-based sample of this size would be $\pm 3\%$, 19 times out of 20

* Oversamples were collected to ensure a minimum of n=100 respondents in each province.

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