

# Canada's Shared Health Priorities: Measuring Progress and Bridging Data Gaps With Common Indicators

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## Abstract

In 2023, Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments agreed to work together to improve healthcare across four priority areas and to develop common indicators to measure progress and report back to Canadians. In October 2024, the Canadian Institute for Health Information released *Taking the Pulse: Measuring Shared Priorities for Canadian Health Care, 2024*, which provides baseline results for 12 of these indicators. Some of the key findings include the following:

- Eighty-three percent of Canadians report having access to a regular healthcare provider.
- Half of Canadians referred to publicly funded community mental health counselling waited 25 days or less for their first scheduled session.
- Only two in five Canadians have accessed their personal health information electronically.

## Introduction to Canada's Shared Health Priorities

Canada's healthcare systems are facing unprecedented strain. Good quality, comparable, standardized data are now more important than ever to improve healthcare delivery and to enable information sharing across patients and providers. With these data, health system planners and policy makers can learn what is working, identify gaps and track progress toward improving patient care.

In early 2023, the federal, provincial and territorial governments agreed to work together to improve healthcare for Canadians in four shared priority areas:

- improving access to primary healthcare;
- increasing the supply of health workforce and decreasing wait times for surgeries;
- improving access to mental health and substance use services; and
- modernizing healthcare information systems.

They also made commitments to prioritize improved care for older adults and to work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners to provide better support for Indigenous health priorities.

To measure progress across jurisdictions in a consistent manner and report back to Canadians, the governments agreed to work with the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) to select and develop a common set of pan-Canadian indicators. CIHI is leading this process, in collaboration with data partners, including Statistics Canada, Canada Health Infoway and Integrated Youth Services, with input from system experts, persons with lived experience and the Canadian public. Twenty-three common indicators under the four priority areas have been chosen.

In October 2024, CIHI released *Taking the Pulse: Measuring Shared Priorities for Canadian Health Care, 2024* (CIHI 2024) with baseline results for 12 of these common indicators. Detailed methodology for all indicators, along with results, was published for Canada as well as provinces and territories where data were available. Three of the indicators are discussed in the following sections.

## Key Findings

### Indicator: Canadians with a regular health provider

"Primary care is the front door to the health care system. It's the first place people should go for care," according to Jane Philpott. When Canadians have access to timely care in the community, they are less likely to visit emergency departments or to be hospitalized for issues that could be treated in the community.

**FIGURE 1.**  
Canadians with a regular health provider



Source: Statistics Canada. Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) – Annual Component, 2023 (provinces) and 2022 (territories).

Most Canadians age 18 years and older (26.2 million, or 83%) reported access to a regular healthcare provider in 2023 (see Figure 1). This means, however, that more than 5 million adults – or 17% – struggled to find one. Access rates were higher among females (87%) compared with males (79%). Adults age 65 years and older also reported greater access (92%) compared with only 74% among those aged 18 to 34.

For Canadians such as Jenna Kedy, a young adult who is managing multiple chronic health conditions, navigating the health system on her own without a regular healthcare provider is “mentally exhausting”: “For me, a minor health issue can turn into a mountain at the speed of light – and so it’s a fear every day that if I get sick, even with something minor, it’s another ER trip.”

**Indicator: Wait times for community mental health counselling**

Mental health issues are on the rise in Canada. It is estimated that one in three Canadians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime (Government of Canada Public Health Infobase 2020). Counselling from a mental health professional, especially when provided early, can improve long-term mental health and prevent hospitalizations (OECD 2020).

While half of Canadians referred to publicly funded community mental health counselling in 2023–2024 were able to have a first session scheduled within 25 days, half waited longer (see Figure 2).

Wait times for mental health services are influenced by many factors, including workforce availability, patient demand, urgency of need and client preferences. According to Debbra Cyr-Label of the New Brunswick Department of Health, the “biggest barrier is staffing – there’s money to deliver new initiatives, but we can’t always recruit or retain the service providers we need to deliver them.”

**Indicator: Canadians who access health records electronically**

When electronic health information systems work well, they gather and securely store up-to-date personal health information, so it is readily available to Canadians and their healthcare providers. With access to their own health information, Canadians feel better equipped to manage their health and advocate for care. In some cases, it can even help them avoid a trip to the emergency department or an in-person visit with their regular care provider (Canada Health Infoway 2023).

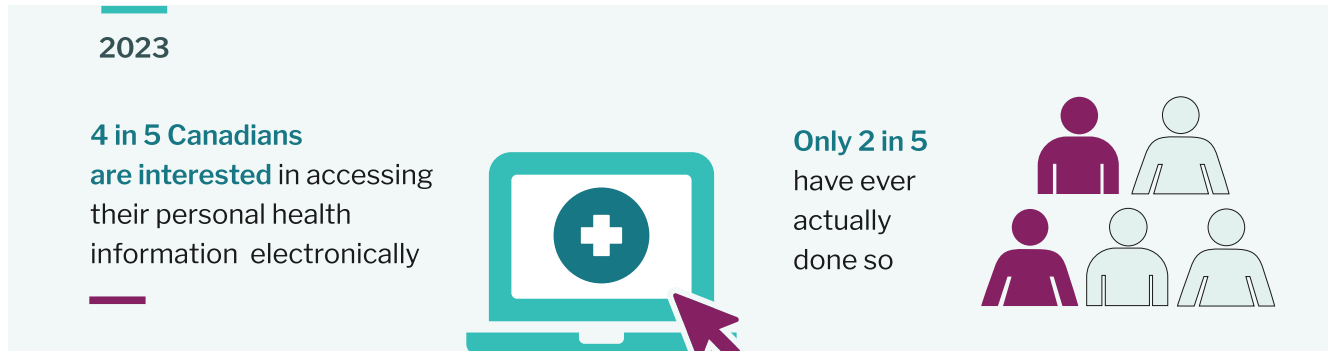
**FIGURE 2.**  
Wait times for community mental health counselling



Note: \*This does not include people who paid for their own care or paid using private insurance, or people who accessed such services without scheduling them in advance (e.g., at a walk-in clinic). One in 10 people waited 143 days or more.

Sources: Provincial and territorial data collection systems, 2023–2024.

**FIGURE 3**  
Canadians who access health records electronically



Source: Canada Health Infoway 2023.

The report shows that while four in five (81%) Canadians said that they were interested in accessing their health information online in 2023, only two in five (39%) had done so (see Figure 3).

These findings may reflect barriers that some Canadians still face when accessing their own health information. Brenda Andreas, a patient advocate and senior who lives in an isolated, rural community, describes her challenges: “I have to contact health records, sign a consent, pay a fee, wait up to 6 weeks and then I get copies of my information which I can share [with my healthcare providers].”

#### Moving forward

Strong healthcare systems rely on strong data. Standardized pan-Canadian data will be key to measuring progress on the shared health priorities across jurisdictions. It will allow federal, provincial and territorial governments to learn from each other while also keeping Canadians up to date on the changes they want to see in their health systems.

CIHI will release updated results on these indicators and report on changes over time. We will also continue to identify and develop new indicators on the healthcare topics important to Canadians. **HQ**

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