



Canadian
Cancer
Society

2023

Prince Edward Island

Provincial election policy recommendations



2023 Prince Edward Island, Provincial Election Policy Recommendations

Thanks to critical investments in cancer research, better methods of detection and more effective treatments, Islanders are living longer with cancer than ever before. Despite these advances, the number of people diagnosed with cancer is expected to increase dramatically in the years to come as the population grows and ages. An estimated 2 in 5 Canadians will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime and about 1 in 4 will die from the disease.¹ By 2030, the number of new cancer cases diagnosed is expected to be 40% higher than it was in 2015.²

Palliative care lets the people who need it, and their loved ones, focus on what matters, when it matters most

Palliative care was developed for and is still largely delivered to patients with advanced cancer - between 80–85% of patients receiving palliative care are patients with cancer.³ As the number of people living with cancer increases, so will the number of Islanders be requiring this care and the number of caregivers needing support.

The Canadian Cancer Society believes that as part of building innovative, responsive healthcare systems we must ensure that people with cancer and their loved ones have access to affordable, culturally safe, high-quality palliative care regardless of where they live and in what setting they choose to receive care.

A recent 2022 Ipsos poll conducted for the Canadian Cancer Society found that 75% of Atlantic Canadians would prefer to die at home. But, before the pandemic, in 2019-2020, of the 642 Islanders that used palliative care at the end of their lives, 81 (or 12.6%) died at home.⁴

Palliative care is often thought of as an option that is only available for people once curative treatment is no longer an option, however, it is a critical component of our healthcare systems.

¹ Canadian Cancer Statistics Advisory Committee in collaboration with the Canadian Cancer Society, Statistics Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada. (2021). Canadian Cancer Statistics 2021. Toronto, ON: Canadian Cancer Society. Available at: cancer.ca/Canadian-Cancer-Statistics-2021-EN.

² Canadian Cancer Statistics Advisory Committee. (2015). Canadian Cancer Statistics 2015 special report on future burden of cancer in Canada. Toronto, ON: Canadian Cancer Society.

³ Canadian Cancer Society. (2016). Right to Care: Palliative care for all Canadians. Toronto, ON: Canadian Cancer Society. Available at: <https://www.cancer.ca/~media/cancer.ca/CW/get%20involved/take%20action/Palliative-care-report-2016-EN.pdf?la=en>

⁴ Palliative Care Center. (2023). Palliative Care Statistics 2021-2022. Charlottetown, PEI: Government of Prince Edward Island.



Palliative care focuses on the quality of life of people who have a progressive, life-limiting illness. It includes pain and symptom management, skilled psychosocial, emotional and spiritual support and comfortable living conditions with the appropriate level of care – at home, in hospice residences, in long-term care, in hospital or in any other setting of the person’s choice. Palliative care lets the people who need it, and their loved ones, focus on what matters, when it matters most.

In 2019-2020, 642 Islanders used palliative care at the end of their lives, 81 died at home.

Palliative care is a critical component of the cancer experience and healthcare overall. Palliative care should be provided early, introduced progressively and with other therapies. Palliative care uses an interdisciplinary team approach to support people with cancer and their caregivers. This includes addressing practical needs and providing grief and bereavement counselling. It offers a support system to help people improve their quality of life throughout their experience – which is why governments need to take action to ensure that everyone who needs it, gets it.

There continues to be gaps in care

We find ourselves at a pivotal moment where the decisions to invest in our health and well-being today will fundamentally shape the future of our healthcare systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has strained our cancer care system, exposing its gaps and vulnerabilities. Addressing these challenges has never been more important. From delayed cancer surgeries and screenings to suspended clinical trials, the long-term impacts of the pandemic are likely to be felt by people with cancer, their caregivers and our cancer care system for years to come. This may mean longer wait times, delays or late-stage diagnoses as our healthcare systems cope with additional demand.⁵

The pandemic has also shown us there continues to be substantial gaps in access to palliative care, as well as home and community care, as outlined in Health Canada's report [*Home and Community-Based Palliative Care: Shaping the future from lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.*](#)

Caregivers who cared for a loved one at home experienced a sharp increase in caregiving duties, exacerbating the need for greater psychosocial, physical and practical supports for caregivers. Those facing homelessness, those in rural and remote communities, and Indigenous peoples faced the most hardship, particularly

⁵ Canadian Cancer Statistics Advisory Committee in collaboration with the Canadian Cancer Society, Statistics Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada. (2021). Canadian Cancer Statistics 2021. Available at: cancer.ca/Canadian-Cancer-Statistics-2021-EN.



with isolation protocols and the shift to virtual care. Advanced care planning and goals of care discussions became imperative during this period.

Together, we can get better at palliative care and caregiver support.

Important steps have been taken to address these challenges. We applaud the government of Prince Edward Island for the development of the new [PEI Cancer Action Plan 2023-2028: Making a Difference Together](#), and the acknowledgement that more must be done to advance the health outcomes for all Islanders at all stages of the cancer experience.

That is why we are calling on all political leaders and parties in Prince Edward Island to:

- ✓ Follow through on the commitments outlined in the *Cancer Action Plan 2023-2028: Making a Difference Together*, by releasing timelines and benchmarks to measure progress against objectives.
- ✓ Ensure that no one with cancer worries about job security while undergoing treatment by extending unpaid job-protected leave to at least 26 weeks.
- ✓ Invest in more health human resources to provide quality, safe and responsive healthcare, including palliative care.
- ✓ Prioritize palliative care in bilateral funding agreements.
- ✓ Create better support for caregivers through the creation of a refundable tax credit or financial benefit.



Recommendation #1:

Follow through on the commitments outlined in the new *Cancer Action Plan 2023-2028: Making a Difference Together*, by releasing timelines and benchmarks to measure progress against objectives

On March 3, 2023, the government of Prince Edward Island released its new [Cancer Action Plan](#). Co-developed by the government and the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer and informed by the voices of those with lived experience, this plan sets a new direction for cancer prevention and cancer care over the next 5 years.

We applaud the government for taking this step, innovating how cancer care is delivered in Prince Edward Island. This new plan not only highlights some of the important work that has already begun as part of the [previous strategy](#), but also advances important measures to further decrease the risk of Islanders developing cancer, creates new access points for care so that cancer is detected and treated early, reduces barriers to care, and ensures Islanders feel supported throughout their cancer experience.

But in order for people with cancer, their caregivers, and all Islanders to understand *how* and *when* to expect these innovations in programs and services, more needs to be done. We are calling on leaders and parties to not only commit to implementing all actions outlined in the 5-year plan, but also commit to developing and releasing a detailed evaluation matrix, including timelines and benchmarks, so that Islanders can properly measure progress of objectives and actions.

Recommendation #2:

Ensure that no one with cancer worries about job security while undergoing treatment by extending unpaid job-protected leave to at least 26 weeks

When Islanders face a life-threatening disease like cancer, their struggle is not just medical but also financial. Islanders with cancer and their loved ones often worry about their employment security and how they are going to pay their bills while they undergo treatment. In addition to a decrease in income, they also face a rise in expenses, such as medication that may not be fully covered by government or private plans, the cost of travel to and from appointments, parking, home care costs, and more.



The Canadian Cancer Society believes that people facing a life-threatening illness such as cancer require financial support and job-protected leave when they take time off work to receive and recover from treatment.

The current length of job-protected leave in Prince Edward Island is not adequate to cover the average length of treatment for most people with cancer. Currently, Islanders who take time off work due to illness risk losing their job after only 3 days of unpaid leave. The average length of treatment and recovery is up to 36 weeks for breast cancer and 37 weeks for colon cancer – two of the most common types of cancer in Canada.

Islanders who take time off work due to illness risk losing their job after only 3 days of unpaid leave.

The current length of job-protected leave in Prince Edward Island is far less than the federal Employment Insurance (EI) sickness benefit, recently increased to 26 weeks. As a result, Islanders are at risk of losing their job unless Prince Edward Island amends legislation to protect their employment.

Islanders and their loved ones should be focused on supporting the needs and wishes of the person receiving care – not about how their bills will get paid or if their job will be protected.

We are calling on leaders and parties to extend the length of unpaid sickness leave job protection to at least 26 weeks to align with the EI sickness benefit. The extension of the federal benefit began on December 18, 2022 and will impact an estimated 169,000 Canadians according to Finance Canada.⁶

Recommendation #3:

Invest in more health human resources to provide quality, safe, and responsive palliative care

Canada is facing a substantial crisis in health human resources. Although the pandemic has exacerbated healthcare provider burnout and staff shortages, the country has had constant, recurrent and widespread challenges in health human resources over a number of decades.

⁶ Employment and Social Development Canada. (2022). Government of Canada improves sickness benefits under the Employment Insurance system. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2022/11/government-of-canada-improves-sickness-benefits-under-the-employment-insurance-system1.html>



We face challenges in the insufficient number of adequately trained, equally distributed and performing healthcare providers. These challenges extend to the entire cancer experience, including palliative care.

Particularly in the face of a growing and aging population, we need to ensure palliative care is available when it is needed by increasing the number of health human resources to deliver care on the Island – including specialists, physicians, nurses and other allied health professionals – across all settings.

We are calling on all political leaders and parties to:

- Increase the supply of healthcare providers. This will require collaboration with regulators and educational institutions to increase the number of seats available in university and college programs while simultaneously addressing capacity issues in clinical placements, preceptorships and training positions.
- Accelerate the licensing of internationally trained healthcare providers who are already in Canada to address existing healthcare workforce shortages over the short and medium term.
- Prioritize cancer care in the development of Atlantic Canada’s healthcare workforce mobility and multi-jurisdictional licensing strategy.
- Develop programs and best practices that promote wellness and psychological safety in the workplace and ensure decent working conditions in all settings with the aim of retaining the current workforce and optimizing healthcare provider motivation, satisfaction, retention and performance.
- Address barriers that prevent healthcare providers from delivering efficient and quality care, including administrative burden, and a lack of protected time for providers to continue their education and training.
- Provide all healthcare providers, including allied providers, with appropriate education and training on the basic principles and practices of palliative care to ensure people with cancer receive the highest quality of care.
- Ensure adequate access to palliative care specialists across all settings of care, trained according to the standards set out in the [Canadian Interdisciplinary Palliative Care Competency Framework](#).
- Promote equity, diversity and inclusion in our healthcare system by addressing systematic discrimination and access barriers affecting underserved populations.



Recommendation #4:

Prioritize palliative care in bilateral funding agreements

The Canadian Cancer Society is calling on political leaders and parties to commit to prioritizing palliative care in the bilateral funding agreements on *Home and Community Care (including palliative care) and Mental Health* to expand access to palliative care services and infrastructure. This includes increasing the availability of specialist resources for consultative advice and education, orientation and training for all care providers offering a palliative approach to care and supports for grief and bereavement.

These investments are necessary to ensure all Islanders have access to the appropriate level and setting of care – whether at home, in a hospital, in long-term care, at hospice residences or any other setting of choice.

In addition, the Canadian Cancer Society encourages the Government of Prince Edward Island to continue to improve systematic, standardized data collection by developing integrated data systems to measure access to palliative care at home, in hospital, and in community settings like long-term care facilities and hospice residences. This includes implementing standardized assessment tools to ensure that every Islander is receiving the quality of care they deserve no matter where they live, the serious or life-limiting illness they face, or where they choose to receive care.

Recommendation #5:

Create better support for caregivers through the creation of a refundable tax credit or financial benefit

Caregivers are the backbone of our healthcare system. According to Statistics Canada, in 2018 roughly 7.8 million individuals – or 1 in 4 Canadians – provided care to a relative or friend with a long-term health condition.⁷

Caregiving is a profound act of love, but it is not without its hardships. Over half (56%) of all unpaid caregivers reported feeling tired because of their caregiving responsibilities, while 44% felt worried or anxious during the past 12 months.⁸

⁷ Statistics Canada. (2020). Supports received by caregivers in Canada. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2020001/article/00001-eng.htm>

⁸ Statistics Canada. (2022). The Daily – More than half of women provide care to children and care-dependent adults in Canada. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221108/dq221108b-eng.htm?CMP=mstatcan>



Additionally, half of all caregivers are between 45-65 years old – the peak earning years in terms of employment and income potential.⁹ Employed caregivers face additional challenges in balancing employment and caregiving commitments.

When caregivers thrive, our healthcare system thrives as well. Our already-strained system could not function without caregivers, who provide 70-75% of care for people receiving home care in Canada.¹⁰ It is estimated that unpaid caregivers save the Canadian healthcare system upwards of \$25 billion every year.¹¹

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We are calling on leaders and parties to create a refundable caregiver tax credit or caregiver benefit program. While this does not fully compensate caregivers for their efforts, it does acknowledge the value of caregiving and provides much-needed financial support directly to families.

A refundable caregiver tax credit is already in place in [Quebec](#) and [Manitoba](#), providing upwards of \$1,266 or \$1,400 per year to a person who acts as a primary caregiver. In Nova Scotia, eligible caregivers are entitled to \$400 per month through the [Caregiver Benefit](#) program, although it is limited to caregivers of low-income adults who have a high level of disability or impairment.

Appropriate support for caregivers will allow our healthcare system to deliver more services at home or in the community, an approach that is often preferred by patients and families and that can lower the high costs associated with hospital care.

⁹ Ploeg and Markle-Reid. (2018). Informal caregivers need better support. Hamilton, ON: McMaster University. Available at: <https://mira.mcmaster.ca/news-events/news-item/2018/04/06/informal-caregivers-need-better-support>

¹⁰ Canadian Cancer Society. (2023). Caregiver support. Toronto, ON: Canadian Cancer Society. Available at: <https://cancer.ca/en/get-involved/advocacy/what-we-are-doing/caregiver-support>

¹¹ Hollander, Marcus J., Guiping Liu and Neena L. Chappell. (2009). "Who cares and how much?" *Healthcare Quarterly*, Vol. 12, no. 2. p. 42–49.



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About the Canadian Cancer Society

The Canadian Cancer Society works tirelessly to save and improve lives. We fund the brightest minds in cancer research. We provide a compassionate support system for all those affected by cancer, from coast to coast and for all types of cancer. As the voice for Canadians who care about cancer, we work with governments to establish health policies to prevent cancer and better support those living with the disease. No other organization does all that we do to improve lives today and to change the future of cancer forever. Help us make a difference. Call 1-888-939-3333 or visit cancer.ca today.

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