



The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Block
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

November 20th 2020

Dear Prime Minister:

Thank you for your continued leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am writing today to ask that at your upcoming meeting of the First Ministers that the state of cancer care be prioritized on your agenda.

There will be an estimated 225,800 new cancer cases and 83,300 cancer deaths in Canada in 2020, this is a health issue of great consequence and universal concern. Our surveys show that almost half of patients report having their cancer care appointments postponed or disrupted because of COVID-19. Results of a study involving Canadian cancer patients published recently in the British Medical Journal, suggest that people whose treatment for cancer is delayed by even one month have about a 10% higher risk of dying. The risk varies from 6 to 13% depending on cancer type and type of treatment. Risk also increases the longer it takes for treatment to start.

As the voice for Canadians who care about cancer, CCS has a sightline to the issues and challenges facing people with cancer and caregivers. We have seen how the concerns of people living with cancer in the age of COVID-19 have evolved and we feel that governments and health organizations should integrate the perspective of people with cancer and their caregivers in their COVID-19 response. The safety of people with cancer, their caregivers, healthcare providers and staff working in the health system needs to be a priority.

We urge all governments to remember that many Canadians are not just facing COVID-19, but life-threatening diseases such as cancer that need solutions now, not after the pandemic has passed. Please prioritize cancer care on your agenda and make resources available to continue cancer care through the pandemic so people with cancer do not become collateral damage of COVID-19. The following are proposals to mitigate the long-term outcomes of COVID-19 and support the nearly 1 in 2 Canadians that will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime:

- Resume all organized screening programs for breast, cervical and colorectal cancers at full capacity and all efforts must be made to not pause their delivery again.
- Prioritize rapid access to diagnostics for those suspected of having cancer.
- Adopt solutions to address the clinical backlog and reduce wait times, especially for postponed cancer screenings and delayed cancer surgeries.
- Integrate psychosocial support for people with cancer, survivors and caregivers into models of care.



Canadian Cancer Society
Société canadienne du cancer

- Ensure that Canadians with cancer have timely access to high-quality, person-centered palliative care and end-of-life care regardless of their age or where they live.
- Recognize caregivers as an essential part of healthcare team and allow them to accompany their loved one with cancer to treatments and appointments regardless of healthcare setting.
- Expand public coverage of take-home cancer drugs in all provinces and address drug shortages to ensure access to cancer drugs without financial hardship.
- Ensure data monitoring and research that has a focus on the long-term impact of public health measures and the health system response on Canadians with cancer and their caregivers.
- Ensure access to transportation and accommodations to help people get to and from cancer appointments.

We look forward to working with you all to achieve these solutions now so we can avoid a cancer care crisis in our country following COVID-19.

Yours sincerely,

Andrea Seale
Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Cancer Society

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The Honourable Francois Legault, Premier of Quebec, Chair, Council of the Federation
The Honourable Brian Pallister, Premier of Manitoba, Vice Chair, Council of the Federation
The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council of Canada
The Honourable Patricia Hajdu, Minister of Health
Loretta O'Connor, Executive Director, Council of the Federation Secretariat

About the Canadian Cancer Society

The Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) is the only national charity that supports Canadians with all cancers in communities across the country. No other organization does what we do; we are the voice for Canadians who care about cancer. We fund groundbreaking research, provide a support system for all those affected by cancer and shape health policies to prevent cancer and support those living with the disease.