

Backgrounder

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Positive public solutions show how we can cut down on surgery waitlists

Surgical waitlists can be dramatically cut if the BC government takes leadership by scaling up innovative projects already underway in the public system.

That's the conclusion that was reached in a paper released last May by the BC Health Coalition and the Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives.

Why Wait? Public Solutions to Cure Surgical Waitlists looks at groundbreaking projects in BC, and successful initiatives in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario. The projects reveal two key changes that will cut wait times if the BC government implements them at a province-wide level:

- **Team-based care:** Surgeons moved from working mainly on their own to working in teams in specialized clinics. Patients are better prepared for surgeries, operations are less likely to be cancelled, operating rooms function more efficiently and hospital stays are shorter.
- **Pro-active waitlist management:** Shifting responsibility for managing waitlists from individual surgeons to health authorities means patients can access the first available surgeon. (People who want to choose their surgeon still can.) Health authorities in turn can make sure efficiencies and best practices from individual hospitals are applied across the system.

The Joint Replacement Access Project at Lions Gate Hospital reduced median wait times for first surgical consult from almost a year to just four weeks, and reduced wait times for surgery from as long as two years to six months.

The Richmond Hospital's Hip and Knee Reconstruction Project reduced median wait times for completed hip and knee joint surgery from nineteen months to under six months. The project also developed a 'tool kit' that has been shared with other hospitals in BC so that they can learn from the Richmond example.

The Saskatchewan Surgical Care Network, Canada's first province-wide surgical patient registry, has used pro-active strategies to reduce wait times. In addition to reporting on waitlists, the network – the province's regional health authorities are expected to actively manage them in partnership with surgeons.

These are just some examples of low-cost, public solutions to long waits for surgery that can be implemented right now. Scaling them up will take collaboration within health care. Allowing more private clinics will make it more difficult to make these changes.

Why Wait? Public Solutions to Cure Surgical Waitlists can be downloaded from www.bchealthcoalition.ca

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