

New Health Accord, October 17--18, 2016

To all the Ministers of Health:

Patients Canada is a national, independent organization that champions health care changes that matter to patients. We seek to bring the authentic, experience-based voice of patients and family caregivers to health care decision-making.

As you work together on a new health accord, we note that patients and family caregivers are absent from the table. Within that context, we at Patients Canada want to be sure that the voice of patients is heard by each of you.

We are pleased to share key findings from a very recent survey with you in the hopes that this information will impact your meetings and bring about change that matters to patients. Most central to our findings are that 75% of respondents do not believe that our health system is living up to the basic values of the Canada Health Act regarding equitable meeting of patients needs. In short the status quo is not meeting patients needs.

In the absence of active patient participation in the health accord process, we trust you will give full consideration to the concerns of patients reflected in the attached appendix. We at Patients Canada will look forward to opportunities to work with you going forward to ensure that the voices of patients are heard as you pursue the important work of establishing a new agenda for health care.

With best wishes,

Michael Decter
Chair
Patients Canada Board

cc: Deputy Ministers of Health
Board Patients Canada

Patients Canada Survey

In the last week, Patients Canada conducted an internet survey with our patient communities across Canada. We received over 650 responses. About 30% of respondents were 49 years of age or less. Of the 70% of respondents who were fifty years or over:

- 25% were between 50 – 59 years;
- 26% between 60 – 69 years;
- 16% between 70 – 79 years;
- 3% over 80 years.

Patients over 50 years old tend to have higher health care system interaction rates than those below 50 thereby making this survey's findings more reflective of health service users.

Our survey put 5 key, substantive, 'hot-button' issues to the respondents. Our findings would indicate that while Canadians are considered to be generally satisfied with health care, those interacting with the health system the most are not.

Key Findings:

Are we living up to the key values of equitable care based on medical need?

The vast majority of respondents, about 75%, believe that our health system is **not** living up to the basic values of the Canada Health Act specifically in terms of equitable, accessible care based on medical need. The three groups that respondents identified as being most disadvantaged were:

- Those living outside large urban centres
- High needs patients who require more care
- First Nation, Metis and Inuit

Top priorities:

In terms of 'top priorities' for consideration by the ministers, we found among seven key concerns a clear top three list that ranked well above the remaining options:

1. Better support for home and community care (59% ranked this in the top three)
2. A health care system that is more responsive to the needs, preferences and choices of patients and their families (56% ranked this in the top three)
3. Greater access based on medical need (42% ranked this in the top three) we see that as the key underpinning principle for all health care policy

Patient Experience of their own health care journey:

This question gauged what patients saw as key barriers in their **own health care journey**. Here respondents were given a list of 10 commonly cited problems with the care journey. On a scale of the least to most difficult, respondents could rate each challenge they face. The top three challenges identified were:

1. Wait times to specialty services, mental health diagnostics, specialists (81% rated this high on the difficulty scale)
2. Burden (financial/emotional) of support for a person to live at home (63% rated this high on the difficulty scale)
3. Availability of services in northern and rural areas (60% rated this high on the difficulty scale)

Where should the ministers concentrate their efforts?

Here Patients Canada asked respondents to consider nine hot button issues and to indicate their respective level of importance. The issues that received the highest scores for importance were:

1. Mental health (89% rated it as important/most important)
2. Home and community care (87% rated it as important/most important)
3. Strengthening the voice of patients in decision making (84% rated it as important/most important)
4. Family doctors and primary care (81% rated it as important/most important)

| Conclusions

It is interesting that while many governments are focussed on increased services at a general level, the perception of system users is that there is little prioritization given to special needs communities including those who need more care and who, most likely are costing the system more. In short, increases in access and services are not going where they are needed or to those who need them most. This is in stark opposition to the basis upon which our publicly funded health system and population based systems are predicated; prioritization based on need. While hospitals tend to prioritize patients in this way, primary care, community and home care services often do not.

We urge that before more priorities are set, our governments make good on ensuring that those most in need have access based on that need. Apart from being good for patients, it would certainly contribute to sustainability.

We also urge that any additional funding provided to provinces simply must be tethered to actual accountability and specific goals. These goals must consider patient preferences – that is they must deliver on the metrics that are important for users of the system.