

Department of Finance Canada

Strong Public Health Care

Backgrounder

April 7, 2022

Since the start of the pandemic, the federal government has invested more than \$69 billion, with more funding to be rolled out in future years, to lead a coordinated federal, provincial, and territorial response to fight COVID-19 and protect the health and safety of Canadians.

The funding includes \$1.2 billion to provinces and territories through the Safe Restart Agreement to bolster health care capacity, support people experiencing mental health and substance use challenges, and provide more than \$600 million for innovative mental health care for Canadians. It also includes \$6.5 billion in top-ups to the Canada Health Transfer for provinces and territories to support their pandemic responses.

As the federal government continues to work with provinces and territories on investing in health care, Budget 2022 takes immediate steps to reduce backlogs in surgeries and procedures, to make it easier for Canadians to access the mental health care they need, and to continue bolstering our health care system.

Reducing the Backlogs of Surgeries and Procedures

As hospitals did everything they could to respond to surges in COVID-19 cases, Health Canada estimates that nearly 700,000 medical procedures were cancelled or delayed.

On March 25, 2022, the federal government announced its intention to provide provinces and territories with an additional \$2 billion through a top-up to the Canada Health Transfer (CHT) to address these backlogs. This will build on the \$4 billion in support provided in 2020-21 as provinces and territories work towards eliminating the backlogs in surgeries and procedures, and on providing the health care that Canadians deserve.

Dental Care for Canadians

Seeing a dentist is important for our health, but can be expensive. A third of Canadians do not have dental insurance, and in 2018, more than one in five Canadians reported avoiding dental care because of the cost.

- Budget 2022 proposes to provide funding of \$5.3 billion over five years, starting in 2022-23, and \$1.7 billion ongoing, to provide dental care for Canadians. This will start with under 12-year-olds in 2022, and then expand to under 18-year-olds, seniors, and persons living with a disability in 2023, with full implementation by 2025. The program would be restricted to families with an income of less than \$90,000 annually, with no co-pays for those under \$70,000 annually in income.

Increasing Loan Forgiveness for Doctors and Nurses in Rural and Remote Communities

In part due to a shortage of doctors and nurses, far too many rural communities—like those in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador—still lack the primary health care they need.

- To help bring more health care workers to the communities that need them most, Budget 2022 proposes to provide \$26.2 million over four years, starting in 2023-24, and \$7 million ongoing, to increase the maximum amount of forgivable Canada Student Loans by 50 per cent. This will mean up to \$30,000 in loan forgiveness for nurses and up to \$60,000 in loan forgiveness for doctors working in underserved rural or remote communities.
- The government is also undertaking a review to ensure that the definition of rural communities under the program does not leave out certain communities in need.

Researching the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19

Scientists and researchers have come a long way in their understanding of how to treat and prevent COVID-19, but we still need to better understand its long-term impacts on many Canadians and our health care system.

- Budget 2022 proposes to provide \$20 million over five years, starting in 2022-23, to support additional research on the long-term effects of COVID-19 infections on Canadians, as well as the wider impacts of COVID-19 on health and health care systems.

Improving Canada's Dementia and Brain Health Research

An estimated one in four Canadian seniors over the age of 85 are diagnosed with dementia. The effects on both those living with dementia and those who care for them can be devastating.

- Budget 2022 proposes to provide \$20 million over five years, starting in 2022-23, to ramp up efforts to learn more about dementia and brain health, to improve treatment and outcomes for persons living with dementia, and to evaluate and address mental health consequences for caregivers and different models of care.

Supporting Mental Well-Being With the Wellness Together Canada Portal

Since April 2020, more than two million people across Canada have accessed free information and support through the Wellness Together Canada portal. Children and young people make up almost 50 per cent of users, and 42 per cent of texting users have identified themselves as LGBTQ2.

- Budget 2022 proposes to provide \$140 million over two years, starting in 2022-23, for the Wellness Together Canada portal so it can continue to provide Canadians with tools and services to support their mental health and well-being.

Addressing the Opioid Crisis

An increase in opioid-related overdoses and deaths since the beginning of the pandemic has devastated communities across Canada. Tragically, many jurisdictions reported a record number of opioid-related deaths in 2021.

- Budget 2022 proposes to provide \$100 million over three years, starting in 2022-23 for the Substance Use and Addictions Program to support harm reduction, treatment, and prevention at the community level.

This builds on the \$116 million provided in Budget 2021 and \$66 million in the 2020 *Fall Economic Statement* for the Substance Use and Addictions Program.

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