



# *The Canadian Orthopaedic Association* *L'Association Canadienne d'Orthopédie*



## **COA Position Statement**

### **Resuming Restorative Surgery: Prioritizing Orthopaedic Surgery Nationwide**

As the COVID-19 pandemic stabilizes and hospitals begin to plan for surgeries that have been postponed, surgeons and decision makers will face ongoing challenges in prioritizing care until our health-care system is fully re-opened. The pandemic has resulted in deferred surgery for thousands of orthopaedic patients awaiting time-sensitive restorative surgery across Canada. These delays in care have resulted in immeasurable pain and suffering for patients. As various provincial governments are now triaging access to care during the gradual resumption of activity, the Canadian Orthopaedic Association is advocating for the tens of thousands of orthopaedic patients, whose access to quality of life altering treatments has been deferred.

An epidemic within a pandemic: Waitlists for orthopaedic care have been steadily rising in Canada prior to this pandemic. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise in waitlists has rapidly exceeded, in magnitudes of order, the capacity for orthopaedic surgeons to manage them without access to fair and equitable operative time. This new wave of undelivered care will overwhelm our health-care system if lack of access to elective procedures is left unchecked.

Unintended consequences of delaying elective orthopaedic care: Deferred access to surgery has serious consequences to patients, including a worsening of the opioid crisis, exacerbation of mental health conditions, worsening of comorbid conditions due to inactivity, and an inability to return to the workforce from worsening disability.

Optimizing outcomes for all patients: We suggest instituting measures that will address both the lifesaving **and** the enormous backlog of restorative procedures. Several potential options exist from moving COVID-19 patients to non-traditional institutions like hotels to designating certain centres as COVID-19 hospitals, while resuming surgical activity in non-COVID-19 hospitals. Allowing surgeons and anesthesiologists operating privileges in non-COVID-19 centres, extending OR times, and recruiting private surgery centres may help manage a predicted, unsurmountable backlog of patients.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, orthopaedic patients were faced with the longest wait times among all surgical specialties. The pandemic has made this worse. Orthopaedic surgeons are united in any and all efforts to advocate for their patients to avert the looming crisis in providing timely care.

Further delaying critical restorative orthopaedic surgery is not sound health policy but rather a horrible failure to distressed patients Canada wide.

**Version 1.0 of this statement was approved by the Canadian Orthopaedic Association's Executive Committee, Standards Committee and Practice Management Committee on May 8, 2020** and prepared by a working group including: John Antoniou, MD, FRCSC, McGill University; Mohit Bhandari, MD, FRCSC, McMaster University; COA Executive Committee.