



## **Access to Orthopaedic Care in Canada**

*Approved by the COA Board of Directors on June 11, 2025*

## **ACCESS TO ORTHOPAEDIC CARE IN CANADA**

### **Position Statement**

Canadians should have timely access to orthopaedic care irrespective of age, diagnosis and province of residence. The Canadian Orthopaedic Association (COA) calls on provincial governments to partner with the Association so that patients can access appropriate orthopaedic care in a safe, fair, timely and transparent manner. The COA strongly supports the principles of evidence-based practice and the responsible and strategic use of health resources.

Background: Access to orthopaedic care for a patient with a musculoskeletal complaint begins with an appointment with an orthopaedist in order to make a diagnosis. Imaging studies are often required in order to make a determination in this regard. Once a diagnosis has been made, the orthopaedist discusses a plan of treatment with his/her patient that may or may not involve surgery. Provincial governments need to maintain sufficient resources to allow appropriately-referred patients to access an orthopaedist or an orthopaedic delegate in a timely manner (immediately for urgent problems or within 90 days for non-urgent problems).

The need for orthopaedic services continues to grow in parallel with Canada's aging population. Canada's universal health care system was designed 50 years ago when Canadians aged 65 years and older constituted less than 10% of the population. By 2030, seniors will account for 25% of Canada's population. While joint surgery remains the best option for relieving pain and restoring function for patients with osteoarthritis, provincial budgetary constraints have led to long wait times for patients.

Health care teams require appropriate resources to allow them to deliver innovative models of care that improve access to affordable and high-quality orthopaedic care. One such innovation is the use of centralized multidisciplinary in-take clinics. Such initiatives need to be associated with sufficient hospital resources to maintain timely access to orthopaedic care to all Canadians.

The increasing health care needs of an aging population need to be addressed. Adaptation to demographic change, including human resource planning, is needed in order to provide timely access to orthopaedic care.

Tell us what you think. The Executive Committee would like to take your comments into consideration when planning the next phase of our advocacy strategy. Please send correspondence to [policy@canorth.org](mailto:policy@canorth.org).

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