



WAIT TIMES FOR JOINT REPLACEMENT SURGERY

Arthritis is the leading cause of joint replacement surgeries, including 99% of knee and over 70% of hip replacements. The devastating pain experienced by those waiting for joint replacements drastically affects quality of life, mobility and the ability to work or spend time with family and friends. Surgical delays lead to further deterioration of joints, more challenging surgeries, and increased costs to the health system and economy.

Addressing this urgent issue is a top priority for Arthritis Society Canada and we are committed to working with all stakeholders (governments, healthcare system leaders, the medical community, industry and others) to implement bold and innovation solutions. These solutions are detailed in our report, [The Wait: Addressing Canada's Critical Backlog of Hip and Knee Replacement Surgeries](#) where we outline targeted approaches to delivering more efficient and person-centred care for joint replacement surgeries:

- Ensure innovative models of care are replicated and shared widely so more Canadians have access to their benefits.
- Standardize how patient data is collected and reported across the country, to make it easier to set national standards and benchmarks.
- Leverage digital technology to reduce wait times, maximize limited health resources and improve coordination of care.
- Increase access to community-based joint health management programs, so more patients have access to proven programs that effectively manage pain pre-op and better optimize results post-op.
- Ensure savings from surgical efficiencies are re-invested into improving patient care.

To accomplish what we have put forward as recommended solutions, provincial, territorial, and federal governments must collaborate and develop a pan-Canadian strategy that includes setting and tracking targets, optimizing resources, implementing innovative models of care, preventing the progression of arthritis through early intervention, and improving access to care. This work should be guided through the lens of patient experience and realizing better health outcomes.

Background

Living for months or years with limited mobility and chronic pain are devastating for an individual, impacting both their physical and mental health as well as their overall quality of life. Delaying and waiting for surgery can lead to additional health challenges, adding costs to the healthcare system.

There is an urgent need to focus on this issue now. There are currently 6 million people in Canada living with arthritis and that number is expected to grow to 9 million by 2040. Arthritis is a precursor to other chronic diseases and is more prevalent than diabetes, heart disease, cancer and stroke combined. Joint replacements are among the most common surgeries performed in Canada. More than 58,000 knee and 58,000 hip replacements are performed annually, with more than \$1.26 billion in estimated hospital-related costs in a year. A recent report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) shows that despite an increase in hip and knee replacement surgeries being performed, people are waiting **longer** than they did before the pandemic.

Evidence-based interventions such as nutrition and exercise programs can allow many people to delay surgical intervention for arthritis, thereby reducing the demand for joint replacement surgery. These preventative and disease management measures can also help many people who live in chronic pain due to arthritis who are not candidates for surgery. It is therefore imperative to continue investing in these interventions, as well as to continue supporting research into new treatments and models of care with the potential to alter the trajectory of arthritis.

We need to start thinking differently about how to resource and prioritize solutions to address this urgent health crisis so people in Canada living with arthritis can start to get back the mobility they deserve.