

The Future of Cancer Control in Canada

A discussion paper on pan-Canadian cancer control priorities
for 2012-2017

Executive summary

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Executive summary

This paper is a starting point to refresh the cancer control strategy for Canada. It demonstrates the impact to date of a pan-Canadian approach to cancer control through a five-year funding commitment by the federal government, and lays out the case for sustained action. It also presents a working list of the major opportunities on the horizon that the Canadian cancer control community should seize to reduce the risk of cancer, save lives and improve the quality of life of people affected by cancer.

Together we are making an impact

In its first four years, the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (the Partnership) has made significant progress and built a solid foundation to accelerate cancer control in Canada. By systematically sharing and implementing best practices across the country, the Partnership has shown that it is possible to reduce the impact of cancer sooner and more cost-effectively for all Canadians.

Since the Partnership was created:

- Unprecedented **high-impact approaches to prevent cancer and other chronic diseases are being implemented across Canadian provinces and territories.** Through the Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention initiative, seven large-scale efforts are being implemented to combat the common risk factors for cancer and other chronic diseases.
- **Organized colorectal cancer screening programs are underway in every province.** To improve Canada's relatively low rates of screening for colorectal cancer, the National Colorectal Cancer Screening Network enabled provinces without existing programs to accelerate and reduce the duplication of effort.
- **Population-based stage data is now within reach.** By bolstering the ability of provinces and territories to collect cancer stage data in a standardized format, the Partnership's National Staging Initiative will yield significant gains in our collective ability to improve cancer patient outcomes and to continuously monitor the effectiveness of screening and treatment programs.
- **Standardized electronic operative and pathology reporting to improve quality and patient safety is now underway in multiple provinces.** Clinicians are leading and implementing efforts to ensure the information necessary to provide timely and quality care is available. By developing and embedding pan-Canadian quality standards into reporting tools, clinicians can now assess and compare their practice and outcomes against best evidence and with those of their colleagues practising in other areas of the country.
- **Comprehensive public reporting of cancer system performance in Canada is now available.** Four years ago, we only had limited information on the performance of the cancer system across the country. At a high level, we could track incidence, mortality and survival, and the self-reported risk reduction behaviours of Canadians. Today, the Partnership tracks quality and makes in-depth provincial comparisons of some of the treatment elements patients receive against best practice standards, and of system capacity, supportive care and survivorship, among other measures.
- **The quality of life of cancer patients and their families is being improved across Canada.** Through its pan-Canadian screening for distress initiative to improve the management of

pain and other symptoms for cancer patients, and through its investment in the Canadian Virtual Hospice, the Partnership is enabling improvements in supportive, palliative and end-of-life care for Canadians experiencing cancer.

- **Co-ordinated, pan-Canadian efforts to improve culturally relevant and people-specific cancer control initiatives for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities are gaining momentum.** The Partnership’s work in this area has been guided by First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to best reflect their needs and priorities. This work includes the development and validation of a First Nations, Inuit and Métis cancer control action plan; the development and dissemination of an online course for community health representatives working in remote and rural First Nations communities; and a new online site with First Nations, Inuit and Métis cancer control tools and resources on www.cancerview.ca.
- **Canada now boasts the Canadian Partnership for Tomorrow Project, a living population laboratory that will help us understand the natural history of cancer and chronic diseases.** Building on the foundation of two previously independent research studies, this project combines the leading population health research expertise in Alberta, Quebec, British Columbia, Ontario and Atlantic Canada. Strategic investments to improve the co-ordination of Canadian cancer research, through the Canadian Cancer Research Alliance have also improved the targeted generation of new knowledge.
- **The Cancer Risk Management platform is enabling decision-makers to model the impact of evidence-based health system investments on long-term disease and economic impacts of cancer.** Through this platform, decision-makers can now compare the long-term impact of investments in various prevention and screening initiatives, and other interventions.
- **The Cancer View Canada knowledge platform (www.cancerview.ca) is supporting efforts across the national strategy.** The Cancer View Canada portal is a neutral Canadian information and collaboration hub for those working in cancer control or dealing with cancer. It supports knowledge management activities happening across the Partnership’s initiatives but also supports partners in their work and profiles their content. Today, over 120 groups across Canada are using Cancer View Canada’s virtual collaboration tools to work together online at no cost to them. The portal also offers critical tools to support patients directly, such as the Canadian Cancer Trials registry.

The case for sustained, co-ordinated action

Due in large part to an aging and growing population, cancer will continue to be a public health concern in Canada. We are also witnessing some troubling trends in lifestyle risk factors, including decreases in smoking cessation rates, increases in overweight and obesity rates, limited physical activity levels and increasing alcohol consumption. If these changes are not addressed, they may also contribute to a rise in the number of cases of cancer and other chronic diseases. At the same time, important advances in the screening for, early detection of and treatment of cancer have improved the long-term prognosis for cancer patients and we will see more survivors living with the disease well after their treatments end. All of these factors will create pressures on many fronts, including the cancer treatment system, primary care and informal care giving, as well as on system capacity to support transitions back to community, school and workplace.

It was forward-looking of our federal government to invest in a national strategy to stem the rising tide of cancer and address its impact on the lives of Canadians. In its first four years, the Partnership has put in motion an innovative and effective approach to managing this tide. If these efforts to catalyze and accelerate cancer control are not sustained, we risk losing momentum and returning to a fragmented and inefficient approach. Sustained, co-ordinated pan-Canadian action is critical to continuing to reduce the impact of cancer on the Canadian population.

Improving cancer control is a long-term journey. The promise and impact of sustaining pan-Canadian momentum in cancer control can be illustrated by looking out 20 years and modeling what could be achieved. The Partnership's Cancer Risk Management modelling platform (www.cancerriskmgmt.ca) provides this capability.

- **For example, we know that if 80 per cent of people aged 50–74 years across Canada had up-to-date colorectal cancer testing by 2013, then by 2030:**ⁱ
 - Approximately 32,000 deaths from colorectal cancer could be avoided. A cumulative increase of \$2.6 billion in earnings would be gained.ⁱⁱ
 - There would be a cumulative increase of \$9.4 billion in total income.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **We also know that if the Canadian smoking rates were 10 per cent today, then by 2030:**^{iv,v}
 - An estimated 58,000 new cases of lung cancer could be avoided.
 - An estimated 46,000 deaths from lung cancer could be avoided.
 - A cumulative increase of \$3.2 billion in earnings would be gained.
 - There would be a cumulative increase of \$10.2 billion in total income.

These are but two high-impact scenarios for two of the most common types of cancer. To achieve this type of long-term benefit for Canadians, a co-ordinated, focused approach is critical.

Where to from here?

In view of the predicted increase in the burden of cancer over the next two decades, there is much we should and can do to curtail this impact. We need to continue to identify innovative solutions that will create efficiencies in the system and help better manage scarce resources. By working together in the cancer control community and by combining forces with other chronic disease partners in both the prevention and end-of-life care domains we can achieve our common goals to reduce the risk and impact of disease for all Canadians.

ⁱ Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. (2010). Cancer Risk Management Model: Colorectal Cancer Model. Retrieved November 30, 2010 from <http://www.cancerriskmgmt.ca/>.

ⁱⁱ This includes earnings from both paid employment (wages and salaries) and self-employment.

ⁱⁱⁱ Total income refers to income from all sources including government transfers before deduction of federal and provincial income taxes.

^{iv} In 2008, 21 per cent of Canadians reported daily or occasional smoking.

^v Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. (2010). Cancer Risk Management Model: Lung Cancer Model. Retrieved November 30, 2010 from <http://www.cancerriskmgmt.ca/>.

In a matter of four years, the Partnership has been able to establish and harness over 43 pan-Canadian networks of partner organizations, representing cancer experts, patients and survivors, clinicians, system leaders and researchers at the national, provincial and territorial levels. It has also built unprecedented capacity to innovate and improve cancer control across the country, including leadership, skills, advisory networks, data and technology. The capacity building undertaken offers a robust vehicle to shape and evolve some of the existing initiatives as well as to implement future high-impact opportunities to control cancer and other chronic diseases. In the coming months, the Partnership will be drawing on these extensive networks to identify the future top-priority opportunities that the cancer control community should seize to save lives, prevent disease and make the best use of evidence.

Summary of major strategic themes identified to date

The Partnership undertook an extensive consultation with its partners and stakeholders, as well as leading cancer control experts, throughout the summer and fall of 2010 to identify where the Partnership is best placed to add value and the potential future opportunities to co-ordinate and accelerate pan-Canadian cancer control. The list of potential strategic themes that emerged from these discussions is summarized below.

Achieve risk reduction in the Canadian population

- Co-ordinate multi-sectoral action to positively impact risk reduction in the Canadian population
- Improve our understanding of the risk factors–biology interaction for cancer and other chronic diseases

Advance excellence in patient care, services and support

- Accelerate the uptake of high-quality cancer screening programs
- Accelerate quality and safety initiatives in cancer patient care and services
- Improve the cancer journey for patients and families
- Accelerate the uptake of culturally appropriate cancer programs and services
- Maximize Canada’s research investments in cancer to deepen our understanding of cancer and to improve care and services

Enable co-ordinated, pan-Canadian cancer control

- Deepen performance measurement and reporting to support quality improvement and application of best practice
- Improve best available tools to support knowledge transfer and exchange
- Improve access to best available data and evidence to inform and support practice, policy, investment and implementation decisions
- Intensify communications and public outreach

We are seeking your input

The strategic themes represent a starting point to refresh the cancer control strategy for Canada. As we think about the next five years of cancer control in Canada, we need to prioritize existing opportunities and determine how best to leverage and integrate the existing work while at the same time identifying new top-priority opportunities.

This document will be used by the Partnership over the winter and early spring of 2011 to nurture further conversations with partners and stakeholders. The Partnership will also accept written feedback from mid-February to early April 2011. The input gathered over the next few months will be critical to refining and shaping the course that, over the next five years, will deepen our collective ability to reduce the impact of cancer for all Canadians.