

How Healthy Are Ontarians and How Is Our Health System Performing? Health Quality Ontario Takes Stock

Toronto, ON – Nov. 20, 2014 – Many Ontarians are finding it challenging in certain parts of the health system to access care when they need it, according to *Measuring Up*, the yearly report from Health Quality Ontario (HQO), the provincial advisor on health care quality.

Being released today at HQO's *Health Quality Transformation* conference, *Measuring Up* (HQO's yearly report on the health of Ontarians and how the health system is performing) reveals that overall Ontarians are healthier than they have ever been before, and are healthier than people in nearly every other province and most countries with comparable data. The report also shows that in many areas Ontario's health system is performing better than it was five and 10 years ago.

The report also shows that there are variations in health and access to care depending on where people live in the province. Ontarians in the north, for example, have much higher rates of obesity and smoking, and twice the rate of premature avoidable death than those in some other parts of the province. This translates to a five-year difference in life expectancy between the healthiest region in the province and the north.

"For each of us in Ontario, health plays a central role in our lives, and we rightly expect to have a top-quality health system that is there for us when we need it," said Dr. Joshua Tepper, President and CEO of HQO. "Knowing how healthy we are and how well our system is working helps us all identify what needs to improve."

Measuring Up marks the first time HQO has used a concise set of indicators (about 40) to monitor the quality of health care in Ontario. This set of indicators – called the Common Quality Agenda – covers everything from the proportion of Ontarians who smoke to the proportion of patients who wait too long for some types of surgery, and spans all health sectors from primary care to hospital care, home care and long-term care. For several of these indicators, the report also compares Ontario's results with other countries, using a Commonwealth Fund survey.

"There's no reason we can't have one of the best health care systems – not just in Canada, but in the world," said Dr. Andreas Laupacis, Board Chair at HQO. "The international comparisons we have included in this report allow us to see where Ontario stands on the world stage. In some areas, such as self-reported health status, we are doing well, but for other measures, such as timely primary care access, we could do better."

Report highlights include:

Ontarians are living longer – and feeling better about their health – than ever: Life expectancy in Ontario has improved to 81.5 years, which is second-highest among the provinces behind British Columbia. When it comes to how we think about our health,

two-thirds of Ontarians rate their health as excellent or very good, more than in most other peer countries in the world.

Many Ontarians have unhealthy lifestyles: Nearly half of Ontarians are inactive, and one out five of us still smokes. Although these rates are better than the Canadian average, there is clearly substantial room for improvement.

Most Ontarians are not able see their primary care provider promptly when they are sick: Nine out of 10 Ontarians have a regular primary care provider which is good news, however 60 percent are unable to see their primary care provider on the same day or next day when they are sick. More than half of Ontarians also have difficulty accessing primary care on evenings or weekends.

Wait times for surgery and emergency department lengths of stay are improving, but some people are still waiting longer than provincial targets: More patients are receiving urgent cancer surgeries and cardiac procedures within the target wait time, but there is still room for improvement. Patients who need emergency department care are being discharged from the emergency department more quickly than they were several years ago, but targets have still not been achieved.

Most home care patients receive their care within the target wait time, but people in some parts of Ontario wait longer than others: The majority of Ontario home care patients appear to receive their first nursing care visit and personal support services within a five-day target, but depending on where they live, they may wait longer than others.

Wait times for long-term care in Ontario are improving, but there is a lot of variation across the province: Median wait times have improved over the last four years. Ontarians waiting for a spot in a long-term care home can expect to wait two to four months, but it varies widely depending on where they live.

Parts of the health system need to be better coordinated: Patients often have trouble receiving care across the different parts of the health system. On a typical day in Ontario, one in seven hospital beds designated for acute care is occupied by a patient who is well enough to receive care in another setting. More than half of patients who were treated in a hospital for conditions requiring follow-up do not see a doctor within seven days of leaving hospital.

Measuring Up also features stories from patients, providers and caregivers, who offer their perspective on the health system, and provide valuable insights that go beyond the numbers and charts.

The findings in *Measuring Up* help point the way towards a healthier Ontario.

“It’s very important to identify what works and what could be better,” said Dr. Irfan Dhalla, Vice-President of Health System Performance at HQO. “We all deserve a system that provides great care, and that allows each of us to flourish.”

To download the report, visit www.hqontario.ca.

About HQO

Health Quality Ontario (HQO) is the provincial advisor on quality in health care. HQO reports to the public on the quality of the health care system, evaluates the effectiveness of new health care technologies and services, provides evidence-based recommendations, and supports the spread of quality improvement throughout the system. Visit www.hqontario.ca for more information.

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