

Suite 601
1075 Bay Street
Toronto ON M5S 2B1
Tel: 416 323-6868
Toll-free: 1 866 623-6868
Fax: 416 323-9261

Bureau 601
1075, rue Bay
Toronto ON M5S 2B1
Tél. : 416 323-6868
Sans frais : 1 866 623-6868
Télééc. : 416 323-9261



Ontario

Ontario Health Quality Council

**Conseil ontarien de la qualité
des services de santé**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ONTARIO FAILING TO MEET CHRONIC DISEASE CHALLENGE

8,000 Lives a Year could be Saved through Better Disease Management

TORONTO, CANADA (DATE) — Ontario, like many parts of the world, is failing to meet the chronic disease challenge and needs to continue improving access to family doctors, the Ontario Health Quality Council (OHQC) said today in releasing its third annual report.

“While we are seeing improvements in some areas of our health-care system, like reduced wait times for certain surgical procedures, we could be saving nearly 8,000 more lives each year and improving the quality of life for many more by better managing chronic disease, using tried and true measures for testing, treating and monitoring patients,” said OHQC Chair Ray Hession. “Today, one-in-three Ontarians suffers from a chronic disease such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma and arthritis. We ignore chronic disease at our peril – and at considerable cost to the health of our citizens and the provincial budget.”

As part of its 2008 Report, the OHQC focused on how Ontario is managing two chronic conditions – diabetes and heart disease. The findings included:

- Fewer than half (47%) of Ontarians with diabetes have their blood sugar under control and just 28% have their blood pressure under control.
- Only 27% have had recommended foot examinations in the past two years, despite the fact that complications from foot ulceration can lead to amputation.
- Of the four types of care used to examine diabetes management, only 5.5% of patients were getting all four.
- People with coronary artery disease are getting just two-thirds of the drugs recommended to keep their vessels from clogging and prevent death. Just 1-in-3 gets all of the recommended treatment.
- Disturbingly, women are far less likely than men to be recommended the right medications or to meet their targets for blood pressure control.

Access to family doctors was another major concern for the OHQC. Research showed that Ontarians are less likely to get prompt care from their doctor when sick than people in many other countries. More than 60% can't get an appointment to see their doctor within two days of becoming sick, and a substantial proportion say they didn't spend enough time with their doctor (42%) or aren't always involved in treatment decisions (39%). While over 90% of Ontarians now have a family doctor, approximately 400,000 want a doctor, and have tried to find one but cannot.

On the positive side, 23% of Ontarians called telephone help lines last year (*Telehealth*), well ahead of most other countries. *Telemedicine*, which uses videoconferencing technology to bring specialized care to remote and rural areas, has boosted the number of visits from 23,500 in 2005-06 to 32,000 in the following year.

Ontario's Wait Time Strategy (WTS) has also been very successful in reducing wait times for surgery in four priority areas. From the time the WTS began in August/September 2005 until the end of 2007, wait times dropped substantially for cataract surgery (down from 311 to 118 days), knee replacements (from 440 to 253 days), hip replacements (351 to 198 days) and cancer surgeries (81 to 57 days). In the fifth priority area, however, waits for MRI scans have not gone down significantly, despite a near doubling of tests.

"We are very pleased to see improvements in select areas of health care, but we have to move from piecemeal change to making continuous quality improvement a hallmark of the entire health-care system", said Ben Chan, CEO of the OHQC. "But that kind of transformation can only take place when Ontario creates province-wide electronic information systems." For the third straight year, the OHQC has said that the lack of information technology in Ontario's health-care system places serious limits on patient care and on the work that health-care researchers and policy experts do.

Today's announcement also emphasized another critical area for the Council: empowering Ontarians to take a more active role in managing their own health, from educating people about the importance of prevention and early detection, to asking more questions about their condition and treatment, setting personal goals and making healthy lifestyle choices.

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For further information, please contact:

Emilia Ciurea
Communications Assistant
Tel: 416-323-6868 x 221

About the OHQC

The Ontario Health Quality Council is an independent agency funded by the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The Council reports directly to Ontarians on access to publicly funded health services, human resources in health care, consumer and population health status, outcomes of the health system. The Council also has a mandate to support quality improvement in the health-care system.