

## Canadians More Open to Private Surgical Facilities

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According to a new survey, Canadians are more open to private healthcare options than before the pandemic, but a policy expert says context matters when it comes to public perception of the health system.

According to SecondStreet, the survey found that most Canadians support governments hiring private health providers to reduce waiting times, expand patient choices, and improve accountability in the healthcare system.

The following are some key findings from Leger's survey of 1,525 Canadians between Nov. 26 and 29:

- The majority of Canadians (67%) support government-sponsored clinics to reduce surgical backlogs caused by the pandemic (18 percent oppose, 15 percent are unsure).
- 62 percent of Canadians surveyed believe "Canadians should be able to purchase healthcare at a private clinic in Canada using their own money" (27 percent disagree, 12 percent don't know).
- The majority of Canadians (79%) believe governments should carefully track and disclose data on waiting list cases where patients die while waiting for care (9% oppose, 12% don't know) (1).

### About Surgical Facilities

Many provincial governments have supported the development of privately owned, publicly funded surgical centers as a way to reduce waiting times at standard acute care facilities. Unlike hospitals, same-day surgery centers offer minor surgical procedures that allow patients to recover at home instead of remaining in a hospital overnight. Non-hospital surgical facilities typically provide:

- Ophthalmology (laser eye facilities)
- Orthopaedic (arthroscopy)
- Weight-loss
- Cosmetic
- Dermatological
- Dental

## **Smaller Facilities Doesn't Mean Smaller Risk**

Despite the fact that more complex cases are typically performed in hospitals, non-hospital surgical facilities are perceived as having higher risks. Because private surgical facilities have restricted or limited contingency plans for intraoperative emergencies and post-operative care, they are perceived as riskier. In other words, in the postoperative phase, the patient is essentially on their own if something goes wrong.

It's not just postoperative risks that make surgical facilities risky. Surgical centres do not require the same staffing and equipment as hospitals. Perhaps this is why some of the most popular surgeries performed in private facilities are cosmetic in nature rather than potentially lifesaving. In any situation, there is always the possibility of equipment deficiencies, such as malfunctioning equipment, breakage of surgical instruments, and missing or incorrect equipment, which can lead to serious injuries or poor patient outcomes.

Furthermore, as multi-professional clinics have a large number of stakeholders, there is a risk of communication breakdowns leading to poor outcomes. A healthcare facility may fail to follow the manufacturer's recommendations for maintenance, cleaning, calibration, and replacement; not report equipment malfunctions to the appropriate personnel for follow-up and testing; receive or relay incorrect training information; and receive or relay inadequate communication about manufacturer equipment recalls.

## **Understanding Evolving Regulations**

Fortunately, governing bodies are taking measures to reduce risks for these facilities and their patients. An increasing number of surgical facilities are being regulated by one of their primary governing bodies, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO). CPSO and the Canadian Association for Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgical Facilities are also governing bodies that accredit surgical facilities. In uncertain times, routine inspections and stricter regulations of private surgical clinics will help build public trust in this alternative healthcare option.

That being said, this sector is evolving while regulations are just catching up. If a surgeon fails to comply with CPSO (College of Physicians and Surgeons in each province) regulations, or if a facility does not follow infection prevention, mitigation, and control measures, poor patient outcomes can result.

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Sources:

1. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8428767/canada-health-care-reform-private-pandemic/>