**Crisis in emergency medicine demands system-wide solutions**

Across Canada, hospital emergency departments are getting busier, and waits are getting longer. This not only jeopardizes the health of patients but also strains the healthcare system to its limits.

Recent data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information reveals a staggering 15.1 million unscheduled emergency visits in the past year, with volumes increasing across all age groups. The prolonged wait times for medical assistance and acute care beds are causing immense frustration among patients and healthcare professionals, prompting the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians to label it a “crisis”.

This is a major issue throughout the country, including here in [insert name of province or local community]. A well-functioning healthcare system – of which emergency departments are a critical part – is central to improving those lives.

Healthcare organizations have cited many reasons for wait times, including a lack of hospital beds, too few trained emergency medicine doctors and nurses, insufficient funding and staff shortages.

This isn’t just a hospital issue to solve. Emergency departments routinely operate well above capacity. Beyond what they can do to become more efficient, we need to address other root causes of wait times.

For example, hospitals can’t admit patients if they can’t discharge them. Many patients occupying acute care patients are themselves waiting for long-term care placements. In some parts of Canada, waits for an acute care bed have exceeded 20 hours.

Many patients arrive at the emergency department because they don’t have a family doctor. That means they’re using the hospital as primary care, overloading the emergency department. Moreover, because they don’t have family doctors, they’re often coming in with undiagnosed illnesses or chronic conditions that aren’t managed as well.

Emergency departments function within a broader health system. Another factor for overcrowding is a misalignment between hospital capacity, care available in the community (including after hours) and changing population needs. This is a healthcare system issue.

No matter the causes, emergency department overcrowding can mean a deteriorating standard of care, with waits combined with overworked and burned-out healthcare providers. We need to invest in our health system smartly, recognizing how improvements in one area can relieve pressures in another.

Healthcare is a major focus of RTOERO’s [advocacy efforts](https://rtoero.ca/giving-back/advocacy/). We’ve called for strengthening long-term care, supports for aging in place, enhanced health care standards for older adults, a national seniors strategy, additional geriatrics training, universal pharmacare and steps to improve primary and alternate care.

Solving the wait time issue is complex. What’s clear is that longer waits can lead to worse outcomes – or can discourage people from going to the emergency departments in the first place.

It’s urgent to look at the range of ways across the system to reduce emergency wait times holistically. There is no single solution, but all connect. Together, they can reduce strain on our already overcrowded emergency departments and lead to a healthier population.

Emergency department wait times are a significant concern to RTOERO’s 84,000+ members across Canada. Since 1968, [RTOERO](https://rtoero.ca/) has been a voice for teachers, school and board administrators, educational support staff and college and university faculty in their retirement. We believe in a better future, together!