

Proposal by the Children's Health Coalition



MAKE KIDS COUNT

An innovative and integrated action plan
for children's health care

October 2022

Before the pandemic, children faced long waits for health care. What was once a critical situation has now become urgent—a generation of children are at risk of significant long-term health problems if we don't address historic children's health care pressures. Every day matters in the life of a child and their development.

The Make Kids Count action plan by the Children's Health Coalition presents an innovative and integrated solution to these pressures, and a path forward to get children and families back on track to health and well-being.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At issue:

The pandemic layered additional challenges on top of a system that was already historically under-resourced for decades. Today, in Ontario, there are kids in emergency department (ED) hallways waiting to be admitted because there are no beds available. Compared to pre-pandemic times, the SickKids ED has a length of stay that has increased by almost 50 per cent, and the average wait time to be seen by a health care provider has more than doubled. At CHEO, April to September 2022 has been the busiest six-month period ever for their ED. Families both with and without primary care providers are bringing their children to EDs for care.

Children's surgical backlogs are at an all-time high in the province, with over 10,000 children and youth waiting for surgeries, 55 per cent of whom have been waiting longer than recommended clinical wait times. These surgeries often need to align with developmental milestones or at least occur early enough in a child's life to prevent complications and optimize outcomes for future physical and psychological health, as well as social development.

Children and youth with critical injuries or life-threatening diseases have been transported across our province, away from friends, family, and community because their local children's or community hospital does not have ICU beds available.

In the community, kids wait at home for critical services. The wait for speech therapy across Ontario is three or more years. Pre-pandemic, there were 28,000 kids waiting for mental health treatment. In 2022, in some regions of the province, only one in three kids gets community-based rehabilitation services within the recommended clinical standard time.

Delays in care always carry the potential to impact health outcomes, but it is especially concerning in children. Every day waiting can lead to lifelong health problems in adulthood. Overall, in the province, children are often waiting longer than adults to receive care. This is a health equity and access to services issue, with children being denied the opportunity to reach their full potential due to delays.

And it's not just children who are waiting. For every child waiting for health care services there are parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, friends, neighbours and teachers waiting and worrying along with them. Each person in a child's life is affected every time we make that child wait. That's millions of Ontarians waiting alongside our kids, all across our province.

Our solution:

We've identified a series of urgent investments to help kids get the right care they need, in the right place and at the right time. These investments will ensure the health care system is equipped to manage historical pressures, the current increases in demand for hospital care, the backlog of surgeries and procedures, diagnostic imaging, increasing hospitalizations and emergency department visits for mental health issues.

Our innovative and integrated approach across service settings and across physical, developmental and mental health will address both new and long-standing barriers to timely access to care. Given the interconnected nature of children's health and health care services, a provincial, system-wide approach is necessary. Investments are needed in solutions that span the pediatric sector as changes and pressures in one part of the system have profound impacts throughout.

The Children's Health Coalition, representing over 150 child and youth organizations across the province, is unique in that children and youth are our focus across the span of children's health care. We provide services that aren't available at any other organization or institution in Ontario. We are calling for an investment of **\$357 million each year for the next four years** to ensure timely access to health care as part of system recovery, to ensure hospital capacity, and to ensure community providers can meet the urgent needs of Ontario's children.

The Make Kids Count action plan is focused on the following objectives:

- 1. Provide timely access to acute care and address wait times so children receive emergency care, critical care, surgeries, ambulatory services, diagnostic imaging, and post-operative supports within clinically appropriate times.**
 - a. Safeguard access to pediatric emergency care by supporting innovative solutions to divert and alleviate pressures from pediatric emergency departments
 - b. Address long wait times and the backlog in surgeries, post-surgical inpatient rehabilitation, ambulatory services and procedures, and diagnostic imaging, ensuring children receive care within target wait times.
 - c. Augment capacity for the pediatric intensive care system to right-size the system and manage upcoming pressures (Level 3 PICU, Level 2 PICU and critical care extender beds).
- 2. Invest in innovative hospital and community programs in mental illness and community rehabilitation and development to divert and alleviate pressure from hospitals and ensure children receive care in the right place and at the right time.**
 - a. Reduce long-standing wait lists and expand community-based rehabilitation and development resources to ensure children have access to services within a window of opportunity to maximize each child's potential and recovery.
 - b. Add acute mental health surge capacity in hospitals and through hospital community partnerships for children and youth in crisis.
 - c. Prevent children and youth with mental health issues from requiring hospital care and ensure step down care is promptly available by investing in community-based child and youth mental health treatment and innovative partnership models.

SOLUTION

YEAR 1 YEAR 2 YEAR 3 YEAR 4 TOTAL

1. Provide timely access to acute care and address wait times so children receive emergency care, critical care, surgeries, ambulatory services, diagnostic imaging, and post-operative supports within clinically appropriate times.

a. Safeguard access to pediatric emergency care by supporting innovative solutions to divert and alleviate pressures from pediatric emergency departments	\$18M	\$16M	\$18M	\$19M	\$72M
b. Address long wait times and the backlog in surgeries, post-surgical inpatient rehabilitation, ambulatory services and procedures, and diagnostic imaging , ensuring children receive care within target wait times.	\$152M	\$153M	\$159M	\$166M	\$630M
c. Augment capacity for the pediatric intensive care system to right-size the system and manage upcoming pressures (Level 3 PICU, Level 2 PICU and critical care extender beds).	\$31M	\$33M	\$35M	\$36M	\$136M

2. Invest in innovative hospital and community programs in mental illness and community rehabilitation and development to divert and alleviate pressure from hospitals and ensure children receive care in the right place and at the right time.

a. Reduce long-standing wait lists and expand community-based rehabilitation and development resources to ensure children have access to services within a window of opportunity to maximize each child's potential and recovery.	\$95M	\$95M	\$95M	\$95M	\$380M
b. Add acute mental health surge capacity in hospitals and through hospital community partnerships for children and youth in crisis.	\$22M	\$16M	\$16.5M	\$17M	\$71.5M
c. Prevent children and youth with mental health issues from requiring hospital care and ensure step down care is promptly available by investing in community-based child and youth mental health treatment and innovative partnership models.	\$25M	\$35M	\$40M	\$40M	\$140M

TOTAL INVESTMENTS

\$1.43B

As the province continues to work on pandemic recovery, the urgency of improving access to children's health care and addressing the historical pressures must be a top priority of the government. The Make Kids Count action plan represents an unprecedented coming together of Ontario's leading children's health care providers to provide a path forward.

ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S HEALTH COALITION

The Children's Health Coalition represents Ontario's leading children's health care providers in pediatric health care and research; rehabilitation; mental health services like targeted prevention, early intervention, short- and long-term counselling and therapy, addictions services, intensive services and acute care; physical, cognitive and communication disabilities; as well as emergency and complex care. We deliver every kind of care a child could need—and we see how the elements of care can work together to support and their families no matter what challenges they are facing.

- **CHEO**
- **Children's Mental Health Ontario (and its membership)**
- **Empowered Kids Ontario-Enfants Avenir Ontario (and its membership)**
- **Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital**
- **Kids Health Alliance**
- **Children's Hospital, London Health Sciences Centre**
- **McMaster Children's Hospital**
- **SickKids**

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