

Improving how cancer care is delivered for patients and care teams across Canada: A plain-language summary of the Health Services Policy Research (HSPR) evidence brief

This document is a plain-language summary of the February 2026 policy brief entitled “Scaling and Sustaining Cancer Control Innovations to Improve Access and Strengthening of Oncology Workforce: Pan-Canadian Considerations.” The full paper can be found [here](#).

Why was this pan-Canadian work done?

More people in Canada are being diagnosed with cancer each year. At the same time, cancer treatments are becoming more complex. Many people, especially those living in rural, remote, or underserved communities, have difficulty accessing equitable and timely care.

Canada is also facing shortages of critical cancer care professionals, including nurses, radiation therapists, oncologists, and other specialists. This makes it harder to meet the growing demand for cancer services.

Because of these challenges, it is important to find new and better ways to deliver cancer care. We need practical solutions that:

- Ensure everyone has equitable access to high-quality care, no matter where they live
- Make the healthcare system more sustainable over time, and
- Support and strengthen the cancer care workforce.

By improving how cancer services are delivered, we can improve outcomes for patients in Canada and inform improvements in other countries as well.

The Canadian Association of Provincial Cancer Agencies (CAPCA), with funding support from the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (CPAC), led this pan-Canadian research project. The project aimed to identify and study new and innovative ways to deliver cancer services that also support the healthcare workforce and help address health equity challenges. The research was carried out by experts from Dalhousie University, BC Cancer, Simon Fraser University and Cancer Care Manitoba.

How was this research done?

This was a nation-wide initiative across Canada. Researchers worked closely with cancer programs, healthcare providers, and system leaders from provinces and territories across the country.

The research team used an approach called *implementation science*. In simple terms, this means they looked at both what new ideas or innovations exist, and how they were put into practice in real-world settings. They studied what helped these innovations succeed, what could make it possible to expand them to more communities, and what challenges teams faced along the way.

Most importantly, the research team asked two key questions:

1. Do these innovations improve care for patients?
2. Do these innovations improve working conditions for healthcare providers?

Answering these questions helps Canada build a stronger and more sustainable cancer care system.

What did the pan-Canadian research find?

First, the research found that many promising innovations in cancer care are already being used in Canada and in other countries. Second, in Canada, many of these innovations started as small pilot projects. They have shown strong results, but they often need stable, long-term funding and organizational support to become permanent programs. With the right support, many of these innovations could be expanded to reach more communities across the country. Third, these innovations show real potential to improve access to high-quality care for patients and communities, while also effectively supporting healthcare providers and strengthening the workforce. If expanded more broadly, they could make cancer care easier to access, better coordinated, and more sustainable over time for Canadians.

Examples of these innovations include:

- Care closer to community and home, such as community-based cancer services, patient navigation programs (which help guide patients through the complex healthcare system), and home infusion programs that allow some to be given at home.
- Team-based care, where different healthcare professionals share responsibilities and new roles are added to better support patients.
- Digital tools and artificial intelligence, which can help coordinate care, support clinical decisions, and improve efficiency.

What does this mean?

- **For patients and families:** These innovations in cancer care could mean care that is better organized and easier to access. Patients may experience shorter wait times, smoother transitions between services, and fewer delays in getting the care they need. More services could be offered closer to the patient's community, reducing the need to travel long distances for treatment. Patients and families may also receive better support in navigating the cancer system. For example, patient navigation programs can help people understand their treatment options, coordinate appointments, and connect with community resources. Together, these improvements can reduce stress and make the cancer journey easier to manage.
- **For healthcare providers:** These innovations can support stronger team-based care, where responsibilities are shared across different professionals. Clearer roles and better coordination can help providers work more effectively together. New tools, including digital supports and artificial intelligence, can also reduce administrative burden and improve communication. This can help reduce burnout, support well-being, and make it easier to retain skilled professionals in the cancer care workforce.

What happens next?

The next phase of this work will focus on putting these proven innovations into practice more widely across Canada. This means helping provinces and territories learn from each other and share what works and what doesn't. It may include developing common standards and best practices, so patients can expect high-quality care no matter where they live.

Another key focus will be strengthening education and training for the cancer care workforce. By supporting healthcare providers with the right skills, tools, and guidance, we can ensure these innovations are successfully adopted and sustained over time.

In short, the goal is to spread proven innovations across Canada so that:

- Access to high-quality care is improved
- Services are stable and sustained
- The cancer care workforce is supported and strengthened.