

December 7, 2020

The Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada

Hon. François Legault
Québec Premier
Chair, Council of the Federation

Dear First Ministers:

Six million Canadians (1 in 5) are living with arthritis and that number is expected to grow to over nine million by 2040. There are over 100 different types of arthritis with osteoarthritis and inflammatory arthritis being the most common forms. Arthritis causes pain, restricts mobility and diminishes quality of life. There is no cure and pharmaceutical treatments play a very large role in managing the condition which persists, for most people, over many years. As a leading cause of workplace disability in Canada, arthritis is a major challenge facing our health care system.

As you meet on December 10th to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 and focus on ensuring Canadians continue to receive high-quality health care, we would like to bring to your attention the urgent need to address the increase in wait times for joint replacement surgeries across the country. Before COVID-19, the Canadian Institute for Health Information reported that there were already significant challenges meeting the benchmark [wait times](#) for knee and hip replacement surgeries. COVID-19 and efforts to confront it have led to additional challenges, including creating an alarming backlog of joint replacement surgeries. According to a recent [study](#) commissioned by the Canadian Medical Association in October 2020, over 307,000 procedures would need to be performed to bring wait times back to pre-pandemic levels.

There is a growing increase in the number of Canadians who require joint replacement surgery; over the past five years, knee and hip replacement surgeries in Canada have grown by 17% – creating a heavy burden on our already strained healthcare system.

The Arthritis Society strongly believes we need to act now! Our [position statement](#) on wait times calls for a clear, immediate and sustained response to this growing crisis. If we are to improve wait times and outcomes for joint replacement surgery, we need a pan-Canadian strategy and action plan that is consistent across all provinces. The Arthritis Society supports the Canadian Orthopaedic Association [position statement on restorative surgery](#) and strongly believes the patient voice should be included in all discussions and decisions.



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Immediate actions the Arthritis Society recommends are:

- The Federal government should increase funding for the provinces and territories to address the enormous backlog of joint replacement surgeries. The federal government can do this by providing dedicated funding or an increase in the Canada Health Transfer payments to the provinces and territories to be used to increase capacity for joint replacement surgeries.
- Support the Arthritis Society as we establish a pan-Canadian Working Group that includes clinical, health system, government, and patient leaders to explore all options and develop pan-Canadian recommendations. This work will be guided through the lens of the patient experience and improving health outcomes.

We call on all First Ministers to support our recommendations that we know will provide high quality health care and the mobility that Canadians with arthritis deserve.

Yours in health,



Trish Barbato
President and CEO

