

4

Sector Actions for a Culture of Innovation

In addition to developing the overall themes and considerations, the delegates worked in groups to develop perspectives and propose initiatives in their sectors of focus.

- 4.1 **Academia and Research** Piali DasGupta, Fiona Grant, Mark MacLachlan, John McArthur, Parker Mitchell (co-ordinator)
- 4.2 **Arts and Culture** Irfhan Rawji, Jennifer Szalai, Mike Wighton, Andrew Calder (co-ordinator)
- 4.3 **Entrepreneurs and Technology** David Eaves, Claudia Harper, Natasha Kong, Joel Tennison, Robyn Tingley, Gord Moodie (co-ordinator)
- 4.4 **Health** Gil Alterovitz, Linlea Armstrong, Fiona Grant, Samir Sinha, Milan Konopek (co-ordinator)
- 4.5 **Professionals** David Eaves, Anne Hoekstra, Chris Kennedy, Dwight Newman, Irfhan Rawji, Robyn Tingley, Geoff Campbell (co-ordinator)
- 4.6 **Public and Voluntary** Marc Kielburger, Cynthia Mackenzie, Eric Miller, Jesse Moore, Alison Loat (co-ordinator)

HIGHLIGHTS

CANADA SHOULD:

- Create a national Healthcare Policy Internship and Electives Program
- Establish the *Care Aware* awards to recognize exceptional individuals based on patient input.
- Construct an internet-based network linking health researchers, health workers and the public

4.4 Health

Perhaps no other area of Canadian public policy elicits a more emotive response than discussions surrounding healthcare. Traditionally, our healthcare system has received international distinction for many reasons, including its principle of universal coverage, needs-based physician planning, strong primary care, high-quality training institutions, and respected health personalities (such as Dr. Norman Bethune, Sir William Osler, and Sister Elizabeth Bruyere). The challenge for the next generation of Canadian healthcare workers¹² will be to find new and innovative ways of building on current successes, while simultaneously remedying those areas in need of attention.¹³

Canada25 delegates are proud of the principles and philosophy of Canadian healthcare, and believe there is an urgent need for the sector to continue to live up to its potential. In order to combine the universality of our health system with consistent top quality, it is imperative that Canada attract and retain the very best healthcare talent possible. *Canada25* firmly believes that to do so, the system must enable healthcare workers to:

R1 Influence the policy environment in which they work.

The sector needs to ensure that the policy ideas of those on the front lines are fully considered in the policy process.

R2 Receive appropriate recognition.

Canada must recognize and celebrate exceptional health care professionals and medical achievements to rebuild national pride in the field.

R3 Be connected to fellow researchers and practitioners nationwide.

The sector must ensure that research in one area of the country is advanced and applied in areas of need elsewhere in a timely fashion.

R4 Better utilize their skills and knowledge.

The sector must strive to reduce the amount of time that highly trained medical personnel are distracted from patient care with administrative tasks.

R5 Have training opportunities and career flexibility.

The sector must create ongoing job flexibility and learning and development opportunities throughout a healthcare professional's career.

R6 Enter their chosen field without a debilitating financial burden.

Given that the cost of attending medical school and the revenue associated with a career in medicine are determined by the public sector, there is a need to strike a balance and ensure crippling debt loads are not the norm.

4.4.1 Improving Connections Between Policy Makers and Healthcare Workers

Many Canadian front-line healthcare workers complain that the policies that affect them are not necessarily designed by people who are familiar with their daily realities, or often lack direct input from them. At the same time, policy makers counterclaim that front-line workers must simply take initiative if they wish to affect health policy. Often, the policy papers developed by nurses and physicians are completed through their own professional organizations rather than the provincial or federal ministries of health.

To build a better understanding and appreciation of how federal and provincial health policy is developed and ways one can go about enacting policy change,¹⁴ *Canada25* proposes the creation of a national *Healthcare Policy Internships/Electives Program* directed at Canadian physicians in post-graduate training programs. Trainees interested in this program would work with health policy analysts or decision makers to complete a personal assignment over the elective's time period. The trainee would develop skills in

VERBATIM

"The Healthcare Policy Internships can help bridge the gaps between our future front-line workers with policy makers, allowing more health workers to have a greater impact on the future delivery of healthcare in Canada."

Samir Sinha, University of Western Ontario Medical Student

VERBATIM

“Showcasing outstanding achievements by Canadian healthcare workers and researchers to both domestic and international audiences would increase Canada’s ability to attract and retain talent.”

Gil Alterovitz, NDSEG Fellow, Harvard/MIT

examining an area of healthcare policy or legislation, and apply their skills in a non-traditional environment. Through this process, they will learn how policy is evaluated and implemented so that the desired change occurs.

The improved understanding of the process and improved relationship between policy analyst and healthcare worker will make policy initiatives more effective. With greater involvement in the process, Canadian healthcare workers will feel more responsible and able to influence change.

Canada25 also recommends that the newly appointed *Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada* hold *in camera* meetings with young healthcare workers to discuss ways that the system can be improved to better utilize the knowledge and insights of frontline healthcare workers. We see this as an important step towards encouraging greater interaction among health policy makers and future healthcare providers.

4.4.2 Ensuring Healthcare Workers and Successes Receive Appropriate Recognition

A rising perception among Canadian healthcare providers is that work done in the U.S. is better appreciated and financially rewarded. This perception is compounded each time Canadian healthcare workers receive recruitment advertisements from abroad, or each time the negative aspects of healthcare jobs are featured in the media. A more concentrated effort to showcase Canadian healthcare achievements at the national and international level can begin to counter this sentiment. A simple, yet meaningful way to improve the awareness of Canadian successes is for Canadian granting agencies to design a distinctive logo to be placed on publications and poster presentations at international meetings. This will generate international awareness of the quality of work being conducted by Canadian healthcare workers and researchers.

Finally, individual cases of exceptional patient care should be celebrated to build awareness and public appreciation for the personal commitment of many in the field. One immediate way to do this

is to establish *Care Aware*, an initiative whereby talented healthcare workers in Canada receive national recognition based on patient review. This initiative has three goals: to recognize the individuals who have made a difference in the lives of others; to focus the attention of Canadians to the high quality of healthcare provided in Canada; and to demonstrate to future healthcare workers some of the rewarding aspects of healthcare jobs to counter stereotypes of overworked and burned-out health professionals. *Care Aware* will be a way through which youth will learn about the types of workers that make up our healthcare teams while gaining insight into the kind of impact they might have on patients if they pursue careers in healthcare.

Care Aware would invite the public to nominate healthcare workers for recognition of outstanding care. Nominees and the hospital/institution in which they work would be informed of a nomination. Further, a group of nominees will be selected for particular recognition, and the stories of their nominations publicized throughout local and national media.

4.4.3 Connecting Health Professionals and Researchers Nationwide

Currently there is no single medium that connects all healthcare workers and health researchers across Canada. As a result the two spheres lack the communication that fosters good ideas, creates mentorship opportunities, and builds collaborative working relationships. Also, there is inefficient utilization of our top talent, in that there are not enough opportunities for young developing talent to learn from our top professionals. *Canada25* believes significant improvement can be made in this area with the establishment of internet-based networks.

The creation of an internet based network between biomedical researchers, healthcare workers, and the public is a crucial step in the process of strengthening Canada's healthcare system.

Canada25 envisions this internet-based network eventually connecting all biomedical laboratories nationwide, and all healthcare workers – while remaining fully accessible to the general public.

VERBATIM

“A public showcasing of positive patient experiences will bring pride to Canadian healthcare workers.”

Linlea Armstrong, doctor

“The research world is currently evolving at hyper-speed, and if the communication gap between healthcare workers and health researchers is not filled in the near future, it will become significantly more difficult for the two spheres to engage in synchronized work and benefit from one and another.”

Fiona Grant, graduate student

IN BRIEF

RECOMMENDATIONS 4.4.4

- Better incorporation of paramedical staff in order to improve quality and delivery of health services
- Restore provision of full-time employment and associated benefits to nurses

Young healthcare workers in-training would be able to contact experienced professionals in search of mentorship, the public would have access to current research breakthroughs and gain increased awareness about Canada's talented health researchers. This Internet portal can be interconnected to networks in other sectors to help promote linkages that help foster cross-disciplinary research, biomedical start-up companies, and other collaborative endeavors.

4.4.4 Enabling Healthcare Workers To Fully Utilize Their Skills And Knowledge

Having completed years of rigorous (and often expensive) training at the post-secondary level, young healthcare workers should have the opportunity to utilize their talents and acquired skills to the fullest of their potential. However, it is often the case that healthcare workers are unnecessarily distracted from direct patient care with duties that could be performed more cost-effectively by other trained personnel.

Although Canada's healthcare needs and resources have changed over the past decade, appropriate changes in care delivery strategies have not yet occurred. While some services have modernized, a wider-scale change is necessary to ensure high quality care in Canada. The better integration and increasing responsibilities of paramedical staff, such as nurses and counselors, would allow healthcare workers to fully utilize their skills and knowledge leading to improved quality and delivery of health services.

In order to attract nursing graduates who have left Canada and to also retain existing ones, *Canada25* advocates restoration of a more favourable ratio of full-time to part-time jobs and reinvestment into educational and mentoring initiatives for nurses. We hope that those responsible for the allocations of the recently announced reinvestment into healthcare by First Ministers in September 2000 will share our priorities.

4.4.5 Building Ongoing Training Opportunities And Career Flexibility

Canada25 believes that continuous opportunities to learn and develop are a key feature in attracting and retaining talent.

Unfortunately, current training prospects for Canadian and international medical graduates in Canada need improvement. For each medical graduate, Canada has fewer funded postgraduate positions than the United States or the United Kingdom.¹⁵ By increasing the number of post graduate training positions in Canada, the likelihood of talented Canadians departing for the United States to pursue similar training decreases, as does the likelihood that they will establish permanent practice in the U.S.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, with a lack of retraining opportunities in Canada, the U.S. has become an option for some seeking specialized training.¹⁷ Furthermore, by attracting talented international medical graduates to enter the Canadian system, Canada's reputation as global magnet for health talent increases.

Training and development opportunities must also be affordable to allow professionals to pursue their field of choice.

Unfortunately, in some areas of specialization, the lack of government financial support has led to an absolute decline in the number of practitioners in the field. For instance, a factor in the decreasing numbers of clinician scientists – individuals trained to practice medicine and research – is the insufficient support for young clinicians beyond the minimal training to complete residency (given that their training requires two-to-three years of salary support beyond the minimal residency). This is particularly worrisome given that Canada has traditionally enjoyed international recognition for its clinical science.

Career flexibility is another important consideration for health care professionals. Anecdotal evidence suggests that rural and urban communities that allow healthcare workers a greater degree of autonomy in terms of employment contract design (e.g. flexible call schedules and provision of temporary substitute staff during vacation time) increase the likelihood of attracting and retaining skilled health professionals.¹⁸

IN BRIEF RECOMMENDATIONS 4.4.5

- Expand the number of post-graduate training and re-training positions for Canadian as well as international medical graduates
- Better financial support for clinician scientists during residency training
- Increase the input that healthcare workers have on the design of employment contracts

IN BRIEF
RECOMMENDATIONS 4.4.6

- Future tuition increases should be regulated and reasonable
- Publicly-funded student financial support systems should be adjusted to cover full cost of post-secondary health training

4.4.6 Ensuring Health Professionals Do Not Enter The Workforce With Debilitating Financial Burdens

Given the length of time required to complete post-secondary training in a health-related field – upwards of eight years for medical students not including residency – coupled with growing tuition deregulation,¹⁹ increasing numbers of young Canadian healthcare workers and in particular physicians are graduating with heavy debt loads. In some cases these debts exceed \$140,000 upon graduation.²⁰ The prospect of a large debt is a disincentive for some to enter the health field at all, and for graduates, is a reason to consider more lucrative job offers in the U.S.

In certain provinces, government-funded bursaries and loans have not increased in parallel with students' tuition and living expenses.²¹ As a consequence, many students are relying on interest-bearing bank loans, for which repayment can not be postponed until after graduation. Prompt debt repayment is becoming a high priority among medical graduates and new practicing physicians. As such, incentives arise to either maximize earnings by pursuing specialties that generate higher incomes, or choose specialties with shorter training periods. Either way, distortions arise and the ability of Canada to attract, retain, or even produce healthcare workers in certain areas decreases. Add into this the increasing willingness of American recruiters to pay off the debts of young Canadian graduates and the incentive to leave Canada becomes significantly higher.

As a prudent first step to alleviating the pressure driving high personal debt loads, *Canada25* recommends that any future tuition increases should be regulated and reasonable. As well, current government funded student financial support programs should be adjusted to cover the full costs of attending a post-secondary institution (as has traditionally been the case). The ultimate goal of these measures is to create an environment where young healthcare talent is retained in order to meet Canada's diverse healthcare needs.

