

**Transforming Canadian Health Care through Consumer Engagement:
The Key to Quality and System Innovation**

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Position Paper

IVEY

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Introduction

In a few short years, Canada's health care system will face a sustainability crisis triggered by the explosive demand for health services, caused by a fundamental shift in Canadian population demographics.

Canadians are living longer. Rates of chronic illness and the number of patients with multiple chronic illnesses are increasing. Some time in the next twenty years, an elderly patient admitted for joint replacement surgery will occupy every hospital bed in Canada.

The math is simple. Canada's public health systems, already struggling to cope with service demands, will have to provide quality care to an aging population, for longer periods of time in order to preserve the nation's health and economic well being. To achieve sustainability, Canada's health system must carefully consider the needs of its patient population and identify strategies to transform health services to meet those needs, within an affordable system that continues to improve the quality of patient care.

Today, Canada's Baby Boomer Generation, pose the greatest sustainability threat to Canada's health system while embodying the greatest potential to shift paradigms in care provision and responsibility sharing. Baby Boomers will consume the majority of health care services in the coming decade as they approach seniority and the "Geri-Boom". For Baby Boomers, independence and wellness are priorities, and they will take better care of themselves than past generations to achieve these ends. Baby Boomers have pioneered social reform in a number of areas and are adept at social change. Our health system needs to leverage that strength and partner with them to transform Canada's health care system to meet present and future service demands.

Despite Canada's spending on health care being among the highest compared to other OECD countries, Baby Boomers and Canadians in general are frustrated with a health system mired by 1950's paper filing systems and old paradigms of thinking. The system has grave difficulty transferring Canada's abundance of leading health knowledge into working health innovations and solutions. 52% of Canadians believe health care requires fundamental changes. 10% believe the system needs to be rebuilt completely.

In short, the time for system level redesign is now! The climate is right for engaging consumers - especially the "Boomer Generation" - at a system level and for a realignment of health service provision that keeps patients in effective preventative care routines and out of emergency rooms. This White Paper establishes consumer engagement as an important tenet in making health system redesign an effective strategy for achieving health system sustainability.

To ensure consumer engagement and system redesign are effective in achieving quality and sustainability goals, health leaders need to gain a better understanding of who their key consumers are. They need to understand what their consumer is willing to do for themselves through improved personal engagement in their own health care. They need to understand what their consumer is willing and able to do to promote health system efficiency and prevent adverse health incidents.

The modern Canadian health consumer is a tech savvy Internet user ready to be engaged with health technology that provides greater personal empowerment and independence. Already, 6% of health consumers maintain a personal health record. Still, Canadian health systems are reluctant to automate administrative functions like scheduling or provide patient access to personal health information and tools to translate that information into better illness prevention and less time spent in health care facilities. Informed consumers can become strategic partners in ensuring efficient quality care provision, but health systems need to change the way they engage consumers in their own health care to realize the efficiency and quality gains that can be made.

This paper outlines five strategies for restructuring the Canadian health system into an efficient, consumer-centric system that generates the world's best and safest patient care and consumer satisfaction.

1. Engage consumers directly in the health care system.

Health systems need to create structure and opportunity for Canadian consumers to fully engage in their own health care. Other health systems around the world have demonstrated impressive results empowering patients to manage their own health and partner on decisions to access specialized services. Canadians are comfortable and active with online technologies, and health systems should leverage this connected consumer behavior to promote the development of online information systems that improve care quality while reducing health system costs. Engaged and informed consumers will make better decisions about their own health needs and health goals.

2. Use new technologies to improve communication flow among the health care team.

Consumers demand that their health practitioners are able to seamlessly communicate with each other. Those same practitioners can improve their efficiency by employing streamlined information systems that utilize mobile communication devices to support “real time” communication and decision making. Dynamic interactive data sharing practices support best practice decision-making and effective, timely collaboration among health team members leads to improved care quality, patient safety and efficiency. Just as consumers demand that their financial information is seamlessly communicated among officials of their bank, consumers should demand - and expect - their health information is available to all members of their care team and that those practitioners have no barriers to communicating with each other.

3. Focus new technology and software development on supporting consumer engagement in accessing the health care system.

Canadian health systems need to utilize social networking connectivity so that socially active consumers can be more proactive in managing their own health and connecting with trusted sources of health information. Software developers need to create open, accessible technologies that simultaneously serve the needs of health professionals and health consumers; allowing them to engage one another in choosing courses of therapy that meet personalized consumer needs. The inclusion of patients in personal health information systems supports informed consumer decision-making that strengthens personalized treatment approaches.



4. Develop new health care capabilities to reach out to consumers and support health and wellness care at home.

To control spiraling health costs and bed shortages in the years to come, Canadian health systems need to develop technologies and organize service approaches that keep people at home. Creating interconnectivity between hospital, home, clinic and communities will allow health consumers to take advantage of personalized services that reduce constant demand for health services in hospitals or clinic settings, and will improve patient autonomy, independence and quality of life through the empowerment of social support networks found closer to home.

5. Use New Technologies to Achieve Real System Integration.

Canadian health systems need to capitalize on the technologies it is investing in to streamline the flow of health information through integrated channels of communication connecting health care agencies and specialized sectors more directly. Health systems need to move beyond paper-based systems that are slow and costly and simply automating the old work-flow is inadequate and will not permit the level of consumer/patient engagement that our system needs. The current systems are simply not efficient or robust enough to enable effective knowledge sharing and collaboration among consumers, their families and health professionals.

Conclusion

This work envisions a modern Canadian health system where its leaders know a great deal about their key consumers, respond to consumer demands and engages those consumers as empowered partners in their own health. The key to realizing this vision are investments in technology that place the consumer at the centre of system design and that efficiently and seamlessly integrate. In fact, this strategy is the only path to a sustainable health system for Canada.

The Ivey Centre for Health Innovation and Leadership is working to develop the leadership capacity our health system needs to undertake these changes, and it seeks to be a catalyst for health system innovation across Canada and around the world.

About the Centre

The Ivey Centre for Health Innovation and Leadership, established in 2009, is a Centre situated within the Richard Ivey School of Business at The University of Western Ontario – home of the only health-focused MBA in Canada, the “Health Sector MBA”. It is dedicated to being a catalyst for health system innovation in Canada, in four key areas. The Centre:

1. Develops leadership capacity through education programs targeting current and future leaders in the health system,
2. Emphasizes education that equips students to identify, understand, embrace and enable innovation in real business situations through programs like Health Innovation Demonstration Projects and Ivey Consulting Projects (projects that bring students, entrepreneurs, and stakeholder organizations together to solve problems in real time),
3. Empowers health system stakeholders to collaboratively focus on the maximization of human and tangible resources within the system, to overcome innovation and leadership deficits,
4. Supports and disseminates research that establishes the evidence base for innovative health system solutions that are applicable in the context of the Canadian health care system.

For further information on the Centre and how it is changing the culture of innovation in Canada, contact:

The Ivey Centre for Health Innovation and Leadership

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