



Analysis in Brief

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Wait Times for Priority Procedures in Canada, 2017



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Introduction

Ensuring timely access to medically necessary services is important to all Canadians. Efforts to improve timely access to care are a focus of many provincial policies and initiatives.^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}

Since 2006, the provinces have reported wait times for priority procedures to CIHI, as identified in the 2004 *10-Year Plan to Strengthen Health Care*.^{i 6}

Wait Times for Priority Procedures in Canada, 2017 provides a snapshot of wait times in Canada. This year's report explores data from April to September 2016 and compares it with data from the previous 4 years.

This report focuses on current wait times for priority procedures for sight restoration, joint replacement, cancer and diagnostic imaging in Canada. A trend is considered an increase or decrease of at least 5 percentage points in the percentage of patients receiving care within the benchmark from the baseline year of 2012. Benchmarks are defined here as “evidence-based goals each province or territory will strive to meet, while balancing other priorities aimed at providing quality care to Canadians. Benchmarks express the amount of time that clinical evidence shows is appropriate to wait for a particular procedure.”⁷



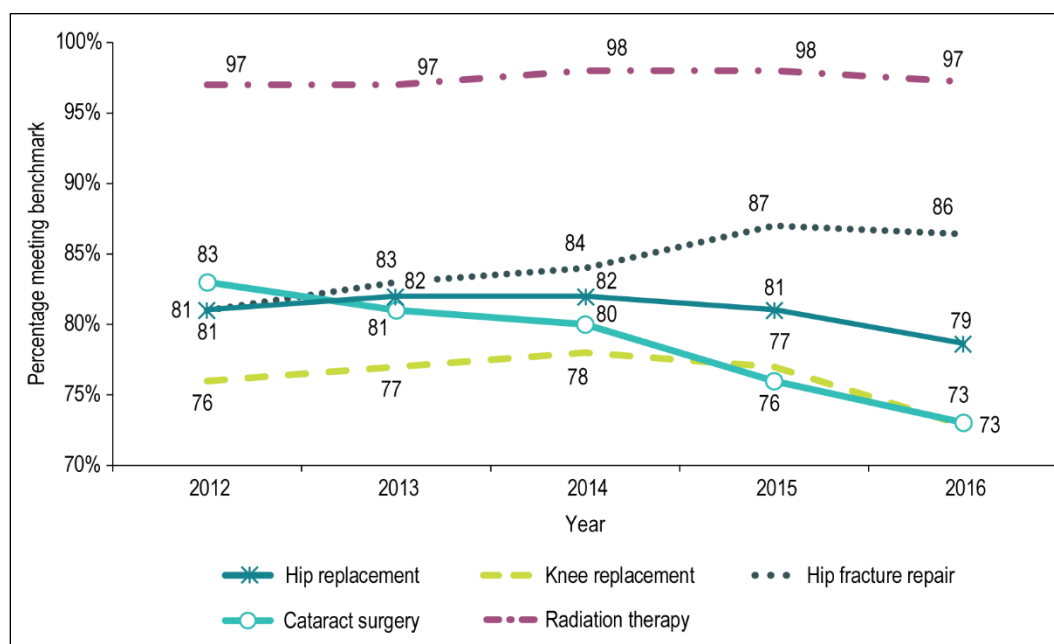
Additional wait time information, including trends by province, health region and priority area, is available on CIHI's website in the [Wait Times tool](#).

i. In the companion agreement, *Asymmetrical Federalism That Respects Quebec's Jurisdiction*, it was noted that Quebec would apply its own wait time reduction plan in accordance with the objectives, standards and criteria established by the relevant Quebec authorities.

Key findings

Generally, 3 out of 4 patients have their priority procedures done within benchmark wait times (Figure 1), but this varies by procedure and where the patient receives care. When looking at the trends over time, wait times for hip fracture repair are improving and radiation therapy remains consistently within benchmark time frames, while patients are waiting longer for cataract surgery.

Figure 1 Percentage meeting benchmark for priority procedures in Canada, April to September, 2012 to 2016



Notes

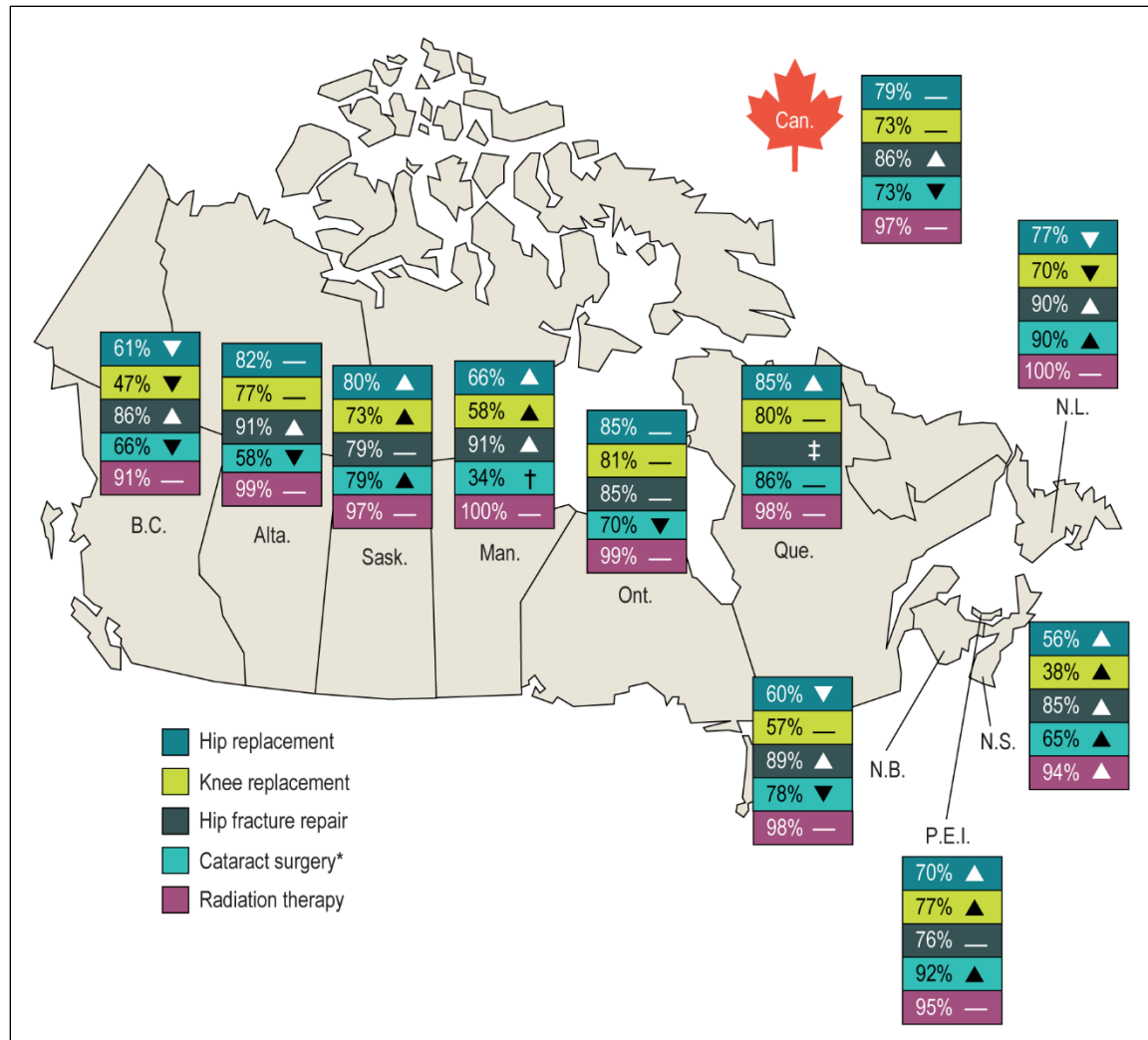
Quebec's hip fracture repair data is not included due to methodological differences in the data.

All-Canada estimates were calculated using provincially submitted surgical volumes and percentages meeting benchmarks.

Volumes have been updated for radiation therapy for Newfoundland and Labrador (2010 to 2013, and 2015).

Looking at the provincial results for each of the 5 priority procedures, no province has the longest or shortest wait times across all the priority procedures (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Change in percentage meeting wait time benchmark, April to September, 2012 to 2016, by province



Notes

- ▲ At least a 5-percentage-point *increase* in percentage meeting benchmark since 2012 (after rounding to nearest percent).
- ▼ At least a 5-percentage-point *decrease* in percentage meeting benchmark since 2012 (after rounding to nearest percent).
- No substantial change in percentage meeting benchmark since 2012.
- * The pan-Canadian benchmark specifies cataract surgery within 16 weeks (112 days) for patients who are at high risk. There is not yet consensus on a definition of "high risk," so the benchmark is applied across all priority levels.
- † Manitoba's results incorporate changes in methodology and coverage that were adopted in 2015 and therefore are not directly comparable with results from 2012.
- ‡ Quebec wait times for hip fracture repair are not included due to methodological differences in the data. As of 2012, the percentage of patients receiving coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery within the benchmark is no longer reported.



Wait times for hip fracture repair continue to improve

- Pan-Canadian wait times for hip fracture repair continue to improve, with the percentage of patients receiving surgery within the 48-hour benchmark increasing from 81% in 2012 to 86% in 2016 (Figure 1).
- The median wait times remained relatively stable in Canada: half of the patients received surgery within 23 hours in 2016 versus within 24 hours in 2012. Variation in these wait times was reported across the provinces, ranging from 19 to 30 hours.
- There was an increase in the percentage of patients receiving care within the benchmark in 6 of the 9 reporting provinces (Figure 2). In Alberta, the percentage of patients receiving care within the benchmark improved by 11 percentage points since 2012; by 9 percentage points in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick; and by 5 percentage points in British Columbia and Manitoba.



Overall, patients are waiting longer for cataract surgery, but some provinces show improvement

- Across Canada, there has been a decline in the proportion of patients receiving cataract surgery within the benchmark of 112 days, from 83% in 2012 to 73% in 2016 (Figure 1).
- The median wait times increased in Canada over this period. Half of the patients received cataract surgery within 67 days in 2016 versus within 47 days in 2012.
- The provincial median wait times ranged from 37 to 148 days in 2016.
- Trends in the percentage meeting benchmark are not consistent across the provinces. The percentage of patients receiving cataract surgery within the benchmark has declined in 4 provinces since 2012 (New Brunswick, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia) and improved in 4 provinces (Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan) (Figure 2).

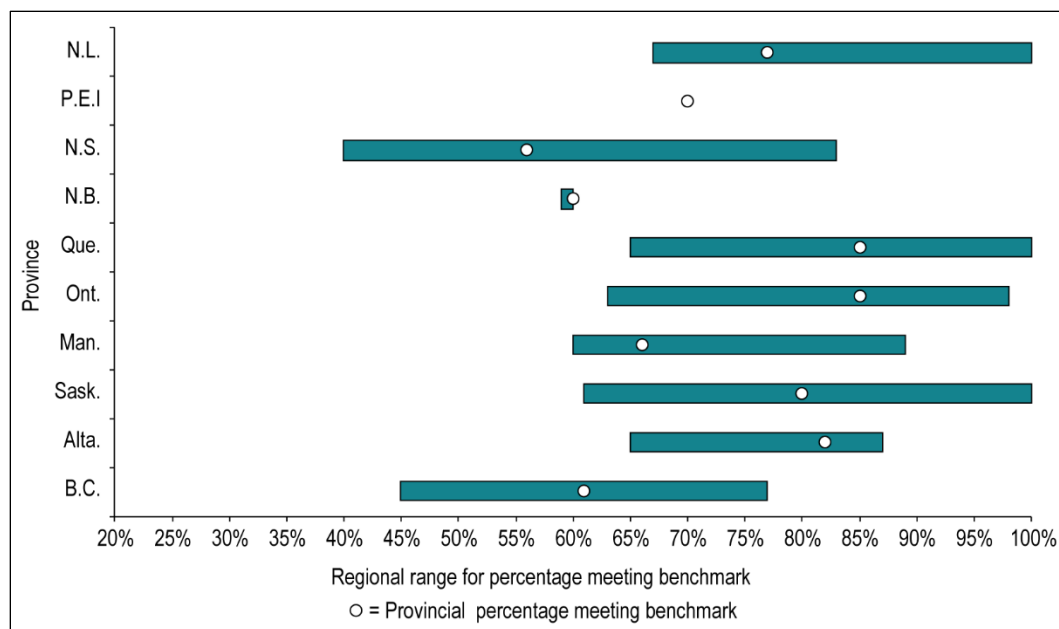


Pan-Canadian wait times remain unchanged for joint replacements, with wide variation across the provinces

- Pan-Canadian wait times for joint replacement remain unchanged in the last 5 years, with 3 of 4 patients receiving hip or knee replacement surgery within the established benchmark of 182 days; 79% of hip replacement patients and 73% of knee replacement patients received their surgery within the benchmark (Figure 1).

- There has been a marked increase in procedure volumes since 2012: 22% for hip replacement and 18% for knee replacement.
- Some provinces did show improvement. The percentage of patients receiving care within the benchmark increased in 5 provinces for hip replacement and in 4 provinces for knee replacement procedures in 2016, compared with 2012 (Figure 2).
- There continues to be a wide variation among the provinces in the percentage meeting benchmark. In 2016, the percentage of patients receiving care within benchmark ranged from 56% to 85% for hip replacement and from 38% to 81% for knee replacement procedures.
- There is also a wide variation *within* provinces. For example, in several provinces, a difference of 30 percentage points or more in the percentage meeting benchmark was reported between regions (Figure 3).

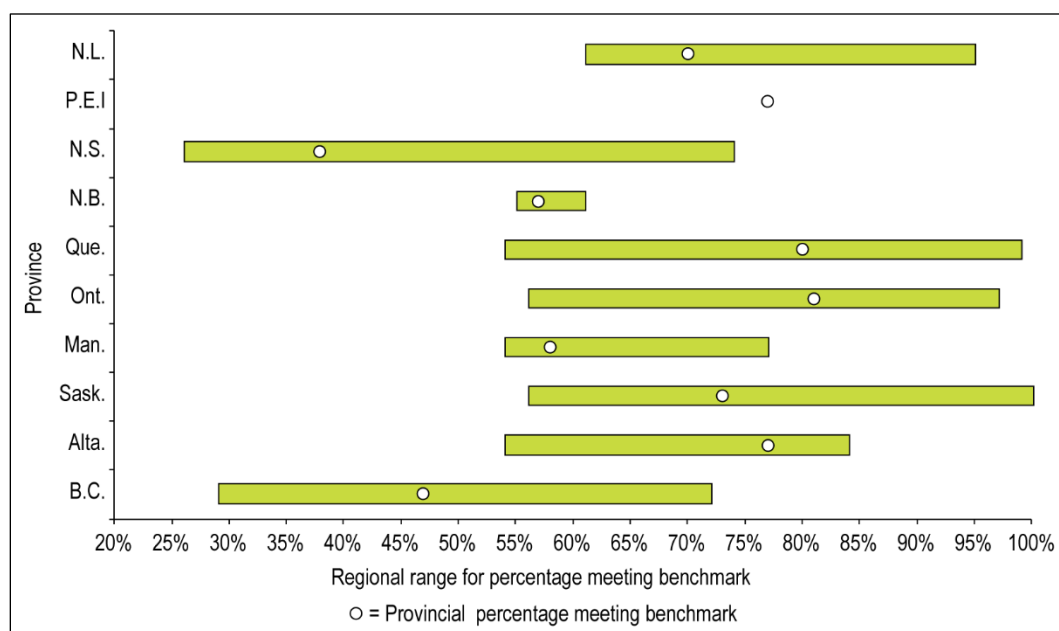
Figure 3A Range in regional wait times for hip replacements, by province, April to September, 2016



Note

Detailed regional-level wait time data for hip and knee replacements can be found at waittimes.cih.ca.

Figure 3B Range in regional wait times for knee replacements, by province, April to September, 2016



Note

Detailed regional-level wait time data for hip and knee replacements can be found at waittimes.cihl.ca.



In all provinces, more than 90% of patients received radiation therapy within benchmark

- Consistent with previous years, radiation therapy wait times remained within the benchmark of 28 days for most (97%) patients in Canada in 2016 (Figure 1).
- At the pan-Canadian level, 9 out of 10 patients received radiation therapy in 19 days.
- There is some variation in wait times for radiation therapy. Across the provinces, 9 out of 10 patients received radiation therapy within 15 to 27 days, all within the medically acceptable wait times.



Cancer surgery wait times have been stable over the past 4 years

- Wait times for 5 cancer surgeries in Canada remained consistent in 2016 compared with the first year of reporting in 2013.ⁱⁱ
- The time a patient will wait for surgery depends on the type of cancer that is being treated. For example, shorter waits were seen for breast, colorectal and lung cancers relative to slower-growing cancers such as prostate (Figure 4).^{8, 9} Overall, 9 out of 10 patients received
 - Breast cancer surgery in 38 days (provinces ranged from 27 to 49 days);
 - Colorectal cancer surgery in 44 days (provinces ranged from 26 to 68 days);
 - Lung cancer surgery in 47 days (provinces ranged from 28 to 87 days);
 - Bladder cancer surgery in 60 days (provinces ranged from 37 to 89 days); and
 - Prostate cancer surgery in 88 days (provinces ranged from 62 to 116 days).
- The provinces continue to work alongside CIHI to develop a standard definition for IV chemotherapy wait time indicators for breast, colorectal and lung cancer, with the goal of comparable reporting in 2018.

Figure 4 90th percentile wait times for cancer surgery, by site, Canada, 2013 to 2016



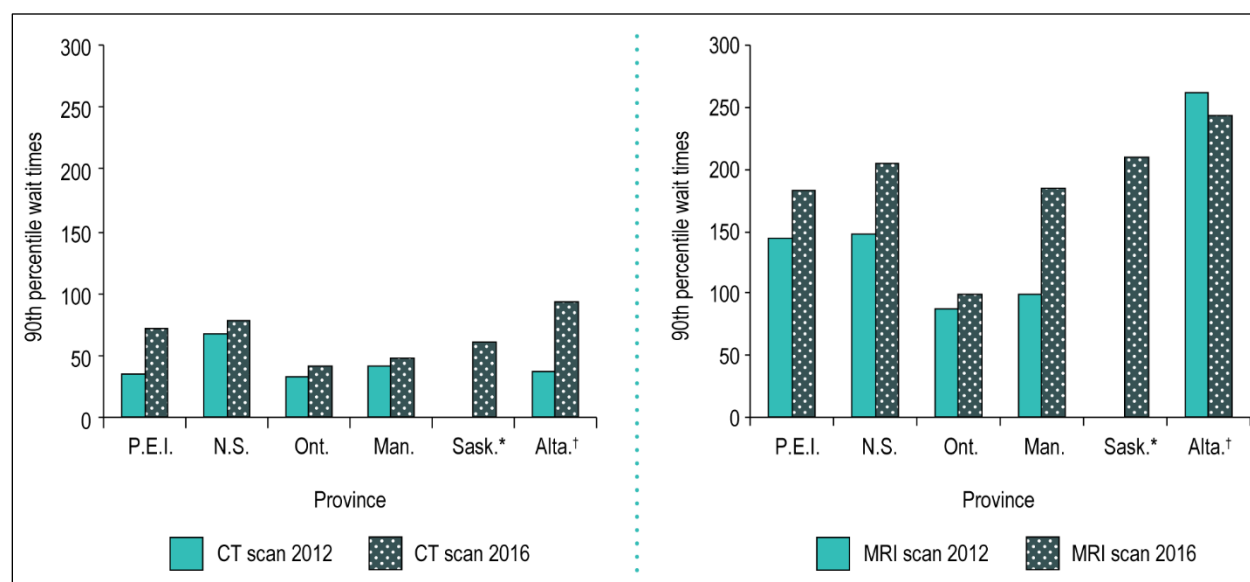
ii. Collection of wait times for cancer surgeries began in 2013. Therefore, there are only 4 years of data to compare.



Wait times for diagnostic imaging (CT and MRI) are increasing

- Diagnostic imaging is an area of potential growth for comparable reporting, as wait time data was available for only 6 provinces in 2016.
- Wait times for a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan were consistently longer than those for a computerized tomography (CT) scan. Overall, wait times for both MRI and CT scans have increased since 2012 (Figure 5).
- There was considerable variation in wait times across the provinces in 2016. For instance, half of the patients received an MRI scan within 33 to 84 days, and received a CT scan within 6 to 34 days.

Figure 5 Provincial wait times (in days) for CT and MRI scans, April to September, 2012 and 2016, by reporting province



Notes

* CT/MRI scan wait time data was not reported by Saskatchewan in 2012.

† Excludes data from Edmonton region in 2012; 2016 data includes all regions.

Wait times for CT and MRI scans were unavailable for Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Quebec and British Columbia.

Summary

In 2016, pan-Canadian wait times continued to show that most Canadians receive their priority procedures within medically acceptable time frames, but this varies by procedure and province. The number of patients receiving care within benchmarks for more urgent procedures continues to improve (e.g., for hip fracture repair) or remains consistently high (e.g., for radiation therapy), while wait times for less urgent procedures, such as cataract surgery, are growing. These divergent trends in wait times, as well as variation across provinces, highlight the importance of continuing to monitor wait times in Canada.

Since pan-Canadian reporting began in 2006, the quality and comprehensiveness of data on wait times for priority procedures have greatly improved. That said, it is important to recognize that the wait times analyzed in this report focused on 5 priority areas; they represent just one part of the wait experienced by patients. A recent CIHI publication shows that Canadians continue to report longer waits to see their family doctors and specialists than adults in other peer countries.¹⁰ As efforts continue to expand the available information on wait times, a greater understanding of all waits experienced by Canadians will emerge.

Appendix: Text alternative for figures

Figure 1: Percentage meeting benchmark for priority procedures in Canada, April to September, 2012 to 2016

Procedure	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Hip replacement	81	82	82	81	79
Knee replacement	76	77	78	77	73
Hip fracture repair	81	83	84	87	86
Cataract surgery	83	81	80	76	73
Radiation therapy	97	97	98	98	97

Notes

Quebec's hip fracture repair data is not included due to methodological differences in the data.

All-Canada estimates were calculated using provincially submitted surgical volumes and percentages meeting benchmarks.

Volumes have been updated for radiation therapy for Newfoundland and Labrador (2010 to 2013, and 2015).

Figure 2: Change in percentage meeting wait time benchmark, April to September, 2012 to 2016, by province

	Hip replacement	Knee replacement	Hip fracture repair	Cataract surgery	Radiation therapy
Province	(182 days)	(182 days)	(48 hours)	(112 days)*	(28 days)
Newfoundland and Labrador	77 ^d	70 ^d	90 ⁱ	90 ⁱ	100
Prince Edward Island	70 ⁱ	77 ⁱ	76	92 ⁱ	95
Nova Scotia	56 ⁱ	38 ⁱ	85 ⁱ	65 ⁱ	94 ⁱ
New Brunswick	60 ^d	57	89 ⁱ	78 ^d	98
Quebec	85 ⁱ	80	‡	86	98
Ontario	85	81	85	70 ^d	99
Manitoba	66 ⁱ	58 ⁱ	91 ⁱ	34 [†]	100
Saskatchewan	80 ⁱ	73 ⁱ	79	79 ⁱ	97

	Hip replacement	Knee replacement	Hip fracture repair	Cataract surgery	Radiation therapy
Province	(182 days)	(182 days)	(48 hours)	(112 days)*	(28 days)
Alberta	82	77	91 ⁱ	58 ^d	99
British Columbia	61 ^d	47 ^d	86 ⁱ	66 ^d	91
Canada	79	73	86 ⁱ	73 ^d	97

Notes

i At least a 5-percentage-point increase in the percentage meeting the benchmark since 2012 (after rounding to the nearest percent).

d At least a 5-percentage-point decrease in the percentage meeting the benchmark since 2012 (after rounding to the nearest percent).

* The pan-Canadian benchmark specifies cataract surgery within 16 weeks (112 days) for patients who are at high risk. There is not yet consensus on a definition of "high risk," so the benchmark is applied across all priority levels.

† Manitoba's results incorporate changes in methodology and coverage that were adopted in 2015 and therefore are not directly comparable with results from 2012.

‡ Quebec wait times for hip fracture repair are not included due to methodological differences in the data.

As of 2012, the percentage of patients receiving coronary artery bypass surgery within the benchmark is no longer reported.

Numbers without an "i" or a "d" indicate no substantial change in percentage meeting benchmark since 2012.

Figure 3A: Range in regional wait times for hip replacement, by province, April to September, 2016

Province	Percentage meeting benchmark (lowest region)	Percentage meeting benchmark (highest region)	Percentage meeting benchmark (provincial)
Newfoundland and Labrador	67	100	77
Prince Edward Island	n/a	n/a	70
Nova Scotia	40	83	56
New Brunswick	59	60	60
Quebec	65	100	85
Ontario	63	98	85
Manitoba	60	89	66
Saskatchewan	61	100	80
Alberta	65	87	82
British Columbia	45	77	61

Notes

n/a: Not applicable.

Detailed regional-level wait time data for hip and knee replacements can be found at waittimes.cihi.ca.

Figure 3B: Range in regional wait times for knee replacement, by province, April to September, 2016

Province	Percentage meeting benchmark (lowest region)	Percentage meeting benchmark (highest region)	Percentage meeting benchmark (provincial)
Newfoundland and Labrador	61	95	70
Prince Edward Island	n/a	n/a	77
Nova Scotia	26	74	38
New Brunswick	55	61	57
Quebec	54	99	80
Ontario	56	97	81
Manitoba	54	77	58
Saskatchewan	56	100	73
Alberta	54	84	77
British Columbia	29	72	47

Notes

n/a: Not applicable.

Detailed regional-level wait time data for hip and knee replacements can be found at waittimes.cihi.ca.**Figure 4: 90th percentile wait times for cancer surgery, by site, 2013 to 2016**

Site of cancer	2013	2014	2015	2016
Bladder	65	57	59	60
Breast	42	42	39	38
Colorectal	44	44	47	44
Lung	49	47	48	47
Prostate	85	84	85	88

Figure 5A: Provincial wait time (in days 90th percentile) for CT scans, April to September, 2016, by reporting province

Province	2012	2016
Prince Edward Island	34	71
Nova Scotia	66	77
Ontario	32	41
Manitoba	41	46
Saskatchewan	*	60
Alberta [†]	36	92

Notes

* CT/MRI scan wait time data was not reported by Saskatchewan in 2012.

† Excludes data from Edmonton region in 2012; 2016 data includes all regions.

Wait times for CT and MRI scans were unavailable for Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Quebec and British Columbia.

Figure 5B: Provincial wait time (in days 90th percentile) for MRI scans, April to September, 2016 by reporting province

Province	2012	2016
Prince Edward Island	143	181
Nova Scotia	147	203
Ontario	86	99
Manitoba	99	183
Saskatchewan	*	208
Alberta [†]	261	242

Notes

* CT/MRI scan wait time data was not reported by Saskatchewan in 2012.

† Excludes data from Edmonton region in 2012; 2016 data includes all regions.

Wait times for CT and MRI scans were unavailable for Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Quebec and British Columbia.

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