

Radiologists calling for \$1.1 billion investment in imaging technology

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The Canadian Association of Radiologists (CAR) wants the federal government to invest more than a billion dollars towards medical imaging technology, arguing that current equipment deficiencies are dragging down the economy by billions every year.

“An investment in imaging is not a cost. It’s an investment – the same as for a road, an airport or something like that. That’s the way we see it,” said Dr. **Michael Barry**, president of CAR, a group that represents about 2,500 radiologists across Canada. “We’re hopeful we get some responses and some investment on behalf of our patients.”

CAR released its pre-budget submission for 2020 on Aug. 2, which included the group’s big ask of \$1.1 billion over five years towards new imaging equipment, such as CT or MRI scanners. The submission was prepared using information from a report about radiology released in June by the Conference Board of Canada. That report argued that excessive wait times for radiology services in Canada resulted in about \$3.5 billion in lost productivity in 2017 alone.

Out of the member countries that are a part of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Canada is rated in the bottom half in terms of the number of available CT and MRI units per million people, according to data gathered by the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH).

Some patients are unable to work while waiting for treatment, and longer wait times for a scan can affect productivity by keeping them away from their jobs for longer, Barry argued. Canada’s aging population also means that the demand for these kinds of medical exams is only going to increase, he added.



Dr. Michael Barry is the president of the Canadian Association of Radiologists (CAR). The organization submitted its brief to the House finance committee on Aug. 2 as part of its pre-budget consultation process (Photo courtesy of CAR).

“We are at a 20-year low in capital equipment in Canada,” said Barry. “There’s some extreme examples of people having long wait lists, and that’s going to get worse. If you’re a patient, that’s a big deal. It keeps you away from work, keeps you preoccupied. It affects your family life.”

Through its pre-budget submission, CAR also pointed out that more than a quarter of the imaging units in Canada are so old that they are no longer as effective as they need to be for optimal patient care.

“Somewhere around 27 to 30 per cent [of scanning units] are past due. We still use them, but they break down often, the technology is not strong, the resolution is not ideal and they don’t do some of the advanced applications that would enhance patient care,” said Barry.

To drive the point home, CAR is planning a social media campaign to be officially launched on Nov. 8, coinciding with the international day for radiology. CAR will encourage its members to post their experiences online

using the hashtag, “#iamyourradiologist,” to raise awareness about radiologists and the work they do.

Radiologists have a story to tell, according to Barry, who recalled a recent incident from his own experience involving the treatment of a 60-year-old man who had suffered a stroke. Barry is a practicing radiologist at the Saint John Regional Hospital in New Brunswick.

“Two radiologists worked for four hours, cleaned out the artery and the guy walked out of the hospital. Those are stories we think should be told,” he said. “The legacy costs to somebody who has a stroke can be hundreds of thousands [of dollars], if not more, through the rest of their life. This person could go back to work within a few weeks, and be productive and have a normal life expectancy.”

CAR is currently registered on the federal lobbyists’ registry with CEO **Nick Neuheimer** listed as the senior officer. The organization has also engaged consultants **Don Moors**, **Brian Klunder** and **Chris Gray** of **Temple Scott Associates**.

Since April, CAR has filed 11 communication reports, listing communication with parliamentarians including Conservative MP **Marilyn Gladu** and NDP MP **Don Davies**, the vice-chairs of the House’s health committee and their respective parties’ health critics.

On its website, CAR is also offering support materials, such as data sheets, for its members who are thinking about contacting their local MPs. The group is interested in having parliamentarians keep radiologists in mind as they develop their election platforms.

“We’re going to have a campaign to contact all our MPs through our membership, executive and board,” said Barry. “We’re going to keep that front and centre.”