



Caring for Canadians in the wake of the pandemic:

RESTORING TIMELY ACCESS FOR MEDICAL IMAGING FOR PATIENTS

COVID-19 postponed medical imaging for hundreds of thousands of Canadians, including lifesaving procedures for patients, adding to the backlog and lengthening waitlists. Before COVID-19, Canada was already experiencing challenges in meeting the demand for medical imaging due to the lack of imaging equipment, health human resources and infrastructure to support these services.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Canadian Association of Radiologists recommends that the Federal Government:

1. Invest \$1.5 billion in medical imaging equipment and health human resources.
2. Create a National Data Science Institute to harness the strategic application of AI related to medical imaging for enhanced patient care and support a sustainable healthcare system.

WAIT TIMES – THE COVID-19 EFFECT

COVID-19 will continue to delay care and have a significant compounding impact on the economy.

Throughout the summer of 2020, the CAR worked with provincial agencies to track the impact of the cancellation of non-urgent imaging. Between March and the end of April (2020) there was a 39% drop in CT exams, 40% for MRI, and 62% for ultrasound. Considering the already extraordinary wait times for medical imaging this drop in service will result not only in missed diagnoses but there are economic impacts as well. Even before the COVID-19 induced drop in diagnostic exams (supply), the Conference Board of Canada's Value of Radiology Report estimated that in 2017 the additional costs of extraordinary wait times would result in a \$3.5 billion loss in GDP. According to the Conference Board, "Having workers off the job while waiting for diagnosis hurts the ability of firms to produce goods and services." This, in turn, hurts GDP, reducing government revenues by \$430 million a year. As wait times increase due to the pandemic, the impact on government revenues will certainly be worse in 2020.

This has been exacerbated by COVID-19 leaving patients in a dire situation. To bring wait lists to an acceptable standard and properly care for Canadians, the government will need to make a significant investment in medical imaging equipment and resources to support the backlog of patients into the healthcare system. For the sake of patient health and the economy, innovative investment is needed before the situation grows any more ominous.

BUILDING RESILIENCE AND SAVING LIVES

Building resiliency in radiology will require an investment in capacity.

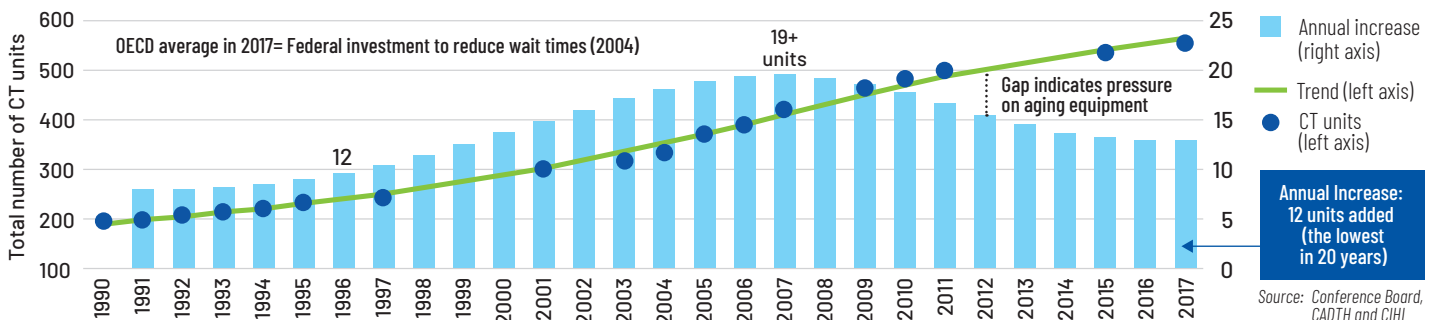
A \$1.5 billion investment in medical imaging equipment, health human resources (HHR) and infrastructure will support Canadians and ensure the integration of technology that will help imaging run more efficiently and effectively. Federal leadership is needed to ensure that each provincial and territorial jurisdiction can get the support that it needs to properly care for Canadians and safeguard their health.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE RADIOLOGY RESILIENCE REPORT

1. COVID-19 led to a significant drop in imaging volumes from March to May 2020 for all modalities.
2. More robust and timely data are needed. The absence of a timely national database and standardized reporting of imaging wait times is a major barrier to evidence-based policy decisions regarding system investment.
3. Additional patients will not receive care in an appropriate timeframe. While progress is being made in addressing the backlog of patients not seen during the postponement of care during COVID-19, many patients waiting for non-critical imaging may not undergo imaging or procedures this year due to radiology capacity constraints.
4. Equipment procurement and investment in infrastructure must be data-driven and prioritized based on accurate metrics related to imaging volume and throughput.
5. More investment is needed for health human resources. Additional technologists and support staff are needed to maintain the operational efficiency of radiology departments.
6. Eliminating redundancy in imaging orders using clinical decision support and improving coordination between hospitals and clinics would help to tackle existing imaging backlogs and lay the foundation for a more efficient system.
7. Improvements to the patient experience are possible if meaningful adjustments are made to our current referral and operational models.
8. The future of radiology in Canada is optimistic, particularly if we harness technology to streamline service delivery, improve workflows, and increase patient engagement in the continuum of care.

Stagnant Growth Trend in CT Units

CT Machines, total units and annual increase in units, 1990–2017

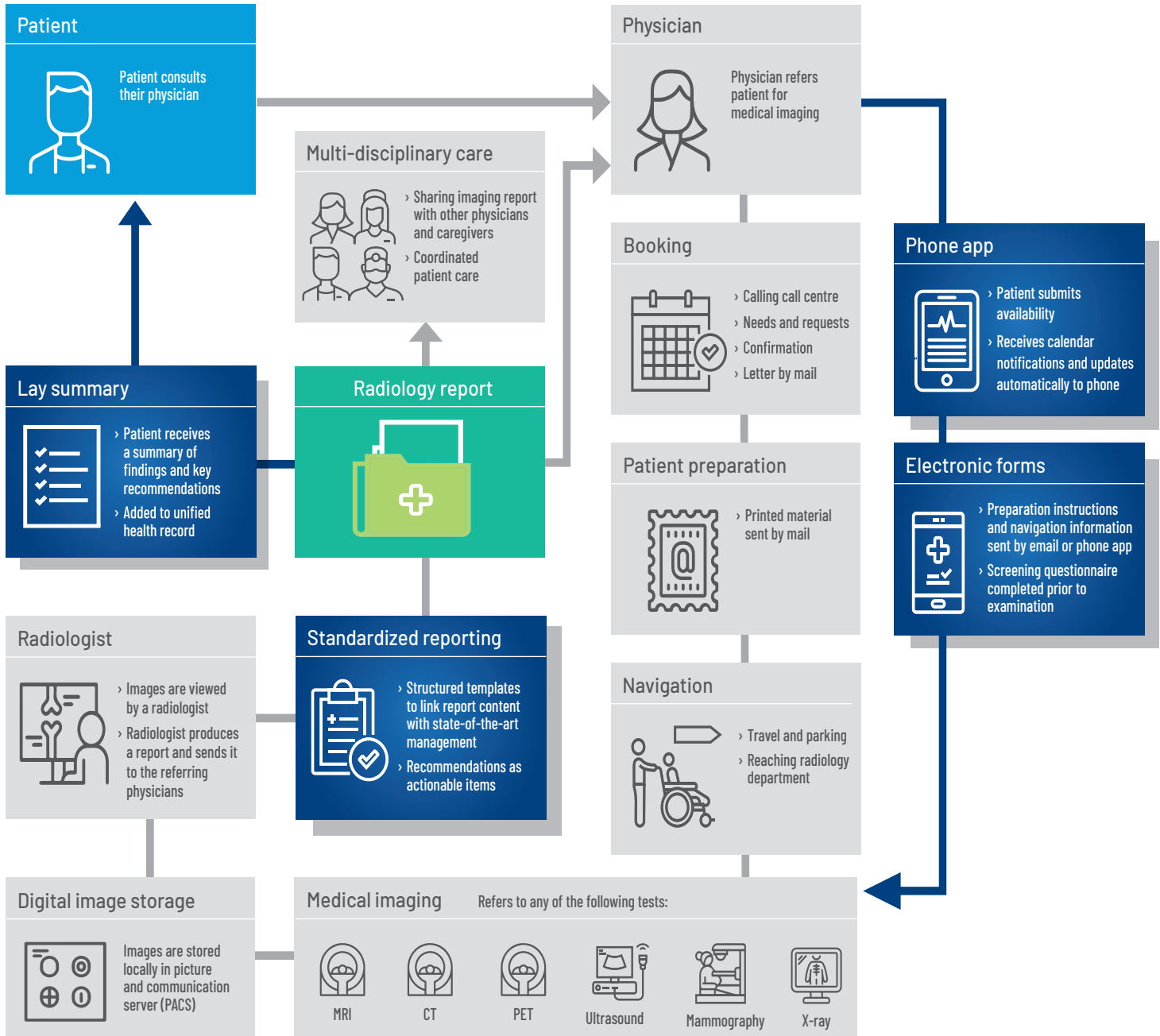


THE WAY FORWARD AND FUTURE OF RADIOLOGY

COVID-19 has demonstrated that our healthcare system was not fully prepared to deal with a global pandemic. Despite the limited resources and absence of safety protocols, the radiology community quickly mobilized to developed guidelines to safely resume medical imaging in Canada. Despite having these efficiencies and processes in place, in our current state, we simply do not have adequate infrastructure, resources and equipment to provide care for patients in a timely manner.

It is the CAR's desire to work with government to lead the charge for improved care for Canadians. A \$1.5 billion investment in medical imaging inventory will provide the capital necessary to ramp up our efforts in radiology and improve health outcomes for Canadians while saving the economy billions in lost productivity. Further investment to increase health human resources, and infrastructure, while ensuring the expedited review of emerging technology will support this funding, improving the resilience of radiology and the healthcare system as a whole.

AN IMPROVED PATIENT JOURNEY THROUGH A RADIOLOGY DEPARTMENT



CURRENT RADIOLOGY SERVICE PATHWAY

IMPROVED RADIOLOGY SERVICE PATHWAY

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Sources: [Radiology Resilience Now and Beyond](#) , [Value of Radiology, Part II](#)

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