



# News Release

For Immediate Release

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## Ontarians are Still Waiting Too Long for Outpatient Surgery: Auditor General

(Toronto) The province has made no progress to improve outpatient surgery wait times, which worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020/21, some surgery wait times increased between 37% and 57% from the previous year, says Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk in her *2021 Annual Report*.

“Patients who need outpatient surgery continue to have long wait times,” said Lysyk. “The Ministry of Health has been too slow to review and implement potential best practices that could ensure patients get the quality care that they require in a timely manner.”

The report notes that wait times vary considerably depending on the region, meaning Ontarians are not being treated equitably. For example, in 2019/20, patients waited 98 days for total knee joint replacement surgery in the Toronto region, but they waited 322 days, more than three times longer, in the Western region.

In addition, there is a lack of public reporting of wait times for individual surgeons. Patients can access wait-time information for hospitals, but surgeons working in the same hospital can have very different wait times. In one hospital, we found an ophthalmologist with an average wait time of 155 days, while another had an average wait time of 42 days almost four months less. However, this information is not available to the public, so patients are not able to consider it when deciding which surgeon to work with.

The report found that hospital operating rooms are underused. The provincial best practice target rate of operating room use is 90%. In 2019/20, approximately 34% of hospitals did not meet the target.

The report also notes that there are surgeons with significantly high or unreasonable billings related to outpatient surgeries, which the Ministry does not sufficiently review. Further, there has been no provincial oversight of surgery providers who mislead patients about their right to receive publicly-funded surgery without having to pay any fees out of pocket, especially cataract surgery. It is the specialty area with the highest risk of misleading sale practices. We found that pricing information is not transparent. Almost all clinics we contacted said that no price lists could be shared without a consultation. Some did share price ranges of specialty lenses, which cost the patient anywhere from \$450 to almost \$5,000 per eye.

“Our audit found that, without system changes wait times will continue to get worse,” said Lysyk.

The audit report contains 13 recommendations for improvement.

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Read the report at [www.auditor.on.ca](http://www.auditor.on.ca)

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