

SUPPORT ACCESS TO SPINE CARE IN ONTARIO

WHY A PETITION?

On the CBC evening national news on June 21, and 25, 2023, health reporter Lauren Pelley reported on a long-simmering, hidden, health crisis in Ontario; (1) (2)

Hundreds of Ontario residents are forced to wait years for complex spinal surgeries in debilitating pain, suffering from a diminishing quality of life and risking life-long consequences and deterioration in function. These patients are waiting unacceptably longer for surgery than medically recommended. Some with severe Scoliosis, with degenerative curving spines causing severe pain and limiting mobility, whose rotating rib cages, start to squeeze the very organs they're meant to protect, causing deterioration of lung and heart function.

The Ministry of Health has contributed to this health-care crisis by implementing a hospital funding reform system and a health care budget, that has only focused on high volume common surgeries in an aging population, such as cataract surgeries, hip and knee replacements and simple spine surgeries, which number tens of thousands of patients on wait lists, and has neglected or overlooked, the smaller volume wait lists for complex spine surgeries numbering hundreds of patients.

A handful of specialized spine surgeons are willing to help but face significant barriers. The government discourages, disincentivizes, these surgeons from performing complex surgeries by forcing them to wait months or longer to be paid and instead incentivizes them to perform government prioritized common surgeries which guarantee fair and timely compensation, further lengthening the wait, pain and suffering for patients who need complex surgery.

For instance, the Ministry of Health has set a goal for priority 4 patients waiting for Orthopaedic (simple) spine surgery to be treated within 182 days. As of June 2023, the average wait in Ontario was 136 days. At Toronto Western Hospital, the wait time for a priority 4, spine surgery was 265 days, one of the worst wait times for an Ontario hospital. In contrast the wait time is over 1000 days for a priority 4 complex orthopaedic spine surgery at Toronto Western. Most of them are patients, from all over Ontario, waiting for corrective scoliosis surgery. Nor is this data collected by the Ministry of Health. (3)

The same priority should be given to both common and complex spine surgeries, with an equal equitable funding model.

The Ontario government should not be discriminating against people who require complex spine surgery. These are usually persons with Disabilities, those with Spinal Deformities such as severe degenerative Scoliosis which is in most cases of unknown origin (Idiopathic) or caused by Neuromuscular disease such as Cerebral Palsy or Heritable Connective Tissue Disorders such as Marfans, or people with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome with severe Craniocervical instability.

Adding to the health crisis in 2022, a lack of collaboration between the Ministry of Health's adjudicators and these health providers, has resulted in unfair assessments and compensation of complex cases, consequently furthering the wait for patients and leaving some in limbo.

The Ontario government has billions of dollars in surplus. (4) There is no valid excuse for this health care crisis and fight over health care dollars with fixed inadequate budgets.

The CBC news story centers on a Toronto surgeon pausing his surgeries due to not being paid. Dr. Stephen Lewis has 13 years of post-secondary education and training at top Canadian medical schools, graduating from McGill medical school, completing a Masters, a 5 year orthopaedic surgery residency at UofT followed by a dual fellowship in Orthopaedic spine surgery. Most notably a spine fellowship in the US at the top Adult Spinal Deformity teaching hospital as well as a Spine Fellowship at St. Michaels hospital in trauma surgery. Patients with severe Scoliosis are referred to him from all over Ontario. They discover that the majority of spine surgeons in Ontario will not even see them or are able to treat them. On top Lewis holds a dual practice between Toronto Western Hospital where he began in 2000 and Sickkids of Toronto where he started in 2006 in order to reach young patients with severe Scoliosis sooner. Fuelled by his dedication to helping the most serious patients with Scoliosis. His complex spinal surgeries are gruelling, all day up to 12 hour, high-risk, extremely complicated, 'reconstruction' surgeries of the spine. No two are alike. Most spine surgeons do not want to do these long challenging surgeries. Lewis has been surgically treating severe difficult scoliosis patients of Ontario for over two decades. They are not candidates for minimally invasive spine surgery. He is clearly under-resourced with a three year plus waiting list at Toronto Western and while shorter, still too long at SickKids. Specialists like Lewis as not easily replaced and clearly more like him are greatly needed in Ontario.

CBC's Pelley interviewed 44 yr old Christine Kaschuba, mother of three, of Whitby Ontario, waiting over three years for surgery. Her spine is curved severely at 70 degrees in the shape of a C, the most common Scoliosis spine curvature. ***"The pain is unrelenting...while her lungs struggle to take in full, deep breaths. Most nights...she just wants to close her eyes and not wake up."*** (2)

These patients, hundreds, treated as third-class patients, are being denied equitable and timely access to complex spine surgery. Some, are just teenagers and very young adults. This is not the universal health care that Canadians are proud of.

You can help

by printing, signing and mailing off this urgent MPP Petition to enact change.

You must be a RESIDENT OF ONTARIO to sign the petition.

It is important you SIGN, PRINT YOUR NAME AND CLEARLY PRINT YOUR ADDRESS WITH POSTAL CODE. Email address is optional. Use two lines if you have to.

When enough signatures are collected, **the signed petitions will be presented to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario by NDP MPP Sara Jama of Hamilton.** The Ontario government only recognizes hand signed petitions, not digital petitions as they should, so this step is critical.

Please help with this urgent health crisis by signing this petition and sharing it with friends, family, colleagues, co-workers and neighbours.

Thank-you!

SOURCES:

(1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xh8q1vJoPZ4> **Ontario surgeon pausing operations because he says he's not getting paid, CBC National News June 21/23**

(2) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/scoliosis-surgery-patient-wait-surgeon-1.6884504> **Health CBC Investigates June 25/23, Patients wait in pain as a surgeon fights to get paid**

(3) <https://www.ontariohealth.ca/public-reporting/wait-times> -Note Ontario Health does not collect data on wait times for COMPLEX Spine surgeries. This search was on Adult (simple) SPINE orthopaedic surgeries in Toronto Ontario on 08/26/23

(4) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-excess-funds-fao-1.6874664> **CBC Toronto, June 13/23 -Ontario will have \$22.6B in 'excess funds' that could be used on programs or debt, FAO says**

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25218732/> **Impact on health related quality of life of adult spinal deformity (ASD) compared with other chronic conditions, Eur Spine J, Jan 2015**

'Medical and health policy providers should be aware of the impact of adult spinal deformity (ASD) on health-related quality of life (HRQL). **A large international study comparing Adult Spinal Deformity patients with patients with other chronic diseases such as arthritis, chronic lung disease, diabetes and congestive heart failure, reported that surgical candidates with ASD displayed the worst HRQL scores.**'

<https://www.srs.org/patients-and-families/conditions-and-treatments/adults>
Scoliosis Research Society

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/1411763/> Pehrsson K, Larsson S, Oden A, Nachemson A. Long-term follow-up of patients with untreated scoliosis. A study of mortality, causes of death, and symptoms. Spine 1992; 17: 1091±

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3844393/> **The role of preoperative pulmonary function tests in the surgical treatment of extremely severe scoliosis, Journal of Orthopaedic Surgery and Research, Sept 5, 2013**

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<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37137668/> **Identification of an increased lifetime risk of major adverse cardiovascular events in UK Biobank participants with scoliosis, Open Heart, May 10 2023**

[https://journals.lww.com/spinejournal/Abstract/2023/06150/Does Adult Spinal Deformity Affect Cardiac.3.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/spinejournal/Abstract/2023/06150/Does_Adult_Spinal_Deformity_Affect_Cardiac.3.aspx) Does Adult Spinal Deformity Affect Cardiac Function? A Prospective Perioperative Study, Spine Journal, June 15, 2023

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34176081/> Does pulmonary function improve after surgical correction of adult idiopathic scoliosis?, Spine Deform, Nov 9 2021

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10193499/> Operative versus nonoperative treatment for adult symptomatic lumbar scoliosis at 5-year follow-up: durability of outcomes and impact of treatment-related serious adverse events, J Neurosurg Spine, April 30, 2021

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20683385/> Risk-benefit assessment of surgery for adult scoliosis: an analysis based on patient age, Spine May 2011

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18939917/> Neurological symptoms and deficits in adults with scoliosis who present to a surgical clinic: incidence and association with the choice of operative versus nonoperative management, NeuroSurg Spine Oct 9 2008

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6259802/> Classification in Brief: SRS-Schwab Classification of Adult Spinal Deformity, Clinic Orthop Relat Res, Sept 2018

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9235246/> Hospital funding reforms in Canada: a narrative review of Ontario and Quebec strategies, Health Res Policy Sys, June 27, 2022

<https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/health-2023> Ontario Health Sector: Spending Plan Review

SUPPORT ACCESS TO SPINE CARE IN ONTARIO

To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

WHEREAS People waiting for complex spinal surgeries, including for scoliosis, are forced to wait years in debilitating pain for the care they need, risking life-long consequences and deterioration in function..

WHEREAS Surgeons are willing and able to help, but the system puts up many barriers. Surgeons face the difficult choice of offering routine spinal surgeries - which guarantee compensation - over complex spinal surgeries, further lengthening the wait times for patients with complex cases.

WHEREAS the lack of collaboration between Ministry of Health Adjudicators and providers has lead to challenges in conducting fair and accurate assessments of complex cases.

WHEREAS Ontario's funding for complex cases for spinal surgeries, derived from the General funding bucket, deprioritizes complex spinal surgeries, over routine/simple surgeries.

THEREFORE, WE THE UNDERSIGNED PETITION THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO TO:

- Address the ever-increasing wait times and make complex spinal surgeries available in a timely manner.
- Immediately improve access to surgery for complex spinal conditions by increasing and equitably funding Spine care in Ontario hospitals.

Will you sign?

Signature	Name (printed)	Address (printed)	Email

Please return petitions with original signatures to Sarah Jama, MPP, 630 Main St. E, Hamilton, On, L8M 1J7