

Care for the elderly: provision of health care services to an aging population



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Background

Canada is witnessing significant growth in its seniors' population. The nation's elderly, aged 65+, now exceed the number of children aged <15. These trends underscore the need for informed health workforce planning to prepare for the potential impact of an aging population on the health care system. At present, Canada has limited data to study how all providers (health professionals, family etc.) care for the elderly.

Objectives

This study investigates the provision of medical care to Canada's elderly population by physicians, including family medicine, and other specialists.

What specialties are most (and least) likely to care for the elderly?
How intensively do physician subgroups focus their practices on seniors?
What types of medical services do seniors receive?

Methods

- The Canadian Institute for Health Information's National Physician Database (NPDB) was used to analyze all fee-for-service care provided to Canada's elderly population (aged 65+) in the 2015/16 fiscal year.
- Eight provinces were included in the analysis (N.L., N.S., N.B., Ont., Man., Sask., Alta., B.C.)
- Population estimates by age group were obtained from Statistics Canada.
- Analyses were stratified by physician specialty (e.g., General Practice, Orthopedic Surgery), patient age group (e.g., 65-69, 85-89 years), and service type (e.g., assessments, major and minor surgical procedures)
- Primary study outcomes were physician counts and adjusted services.

Results

- Most physicians (88%) provided care to Canada's elderly population but participation rates decreased with increasing patient age.
- In 2015/16, over 70 million services were provided to patients aged 65+; accounting for 32% of all services (Fig. 1).
- Around 18 million services were delivered to individuals aged 65-69 years old; aged 94 and older had the highest per capita services (Fig. 1)
- Geriatricians devoted the majority of their practice to the elderly, but other specialties, such as Ophthalmology, also provided more than 50% of their services to patients aged 65+ (Fig. 2).

DID YOU KNOW?

General Practitioners, Internists, and Ophthalmologists delivered 84% of all services to the elderly (Table 1).

FIGURE 1 – Adjusted service counts and per capita services by patient age group (2015/2016). Source: CIHI (NPDB); Statistics Canada (CANSIM)

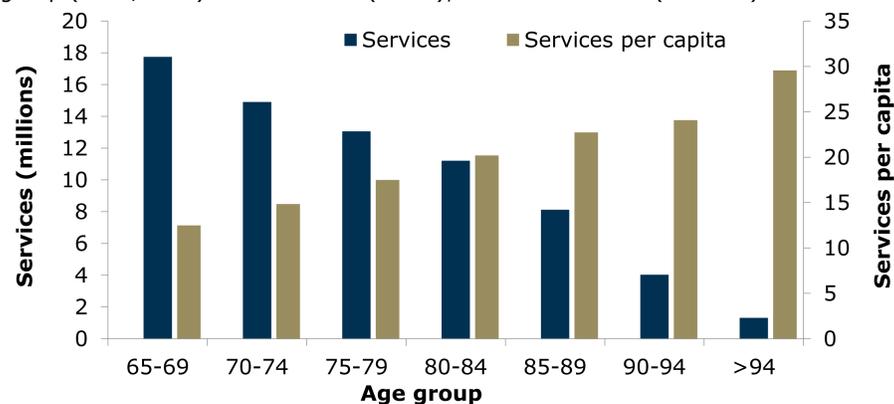
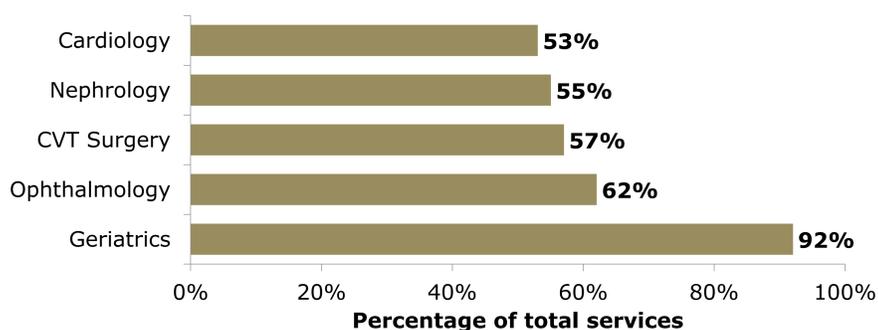


FIGURE 2 – Top five disciplines providing care to the elderly - percentage of practice by physician specialty (2015/16). Source: CIHI (NPDB)



CVT = Cardiovascular/Thoracic

TABLE 1 – Adjusted service counts provided to the elderly, 2015/16, stratified by physician specialty. Source: CIHI (NPDB)

Specialty	Total number of services (million)	Number and percent of total services delivered to 65+ (million, %)	Percent of specialty's total service directed to 65+
General Practice	122.23	35.45 (50.5%)	29.0%
MEDICAL SPECIALTIES			
Dermatology	4.25	1.49 (2.1%)	35.1%
Internal Medicine	33.35	15.91 (22.6%)	47.7%
Neurology	1.85	0.59 (0.8%)	31.9%
Pediatrics	6.48	0.07 (0.1%)	1.1%
Physical Medicine	1.00	0.39 (0.6%)	39.0%
Psychiatry	9.12	1.29 (1.8%)	14.1%
SURGICAL SPECIALTIES			
General Surgery	5.39	2.07 (2.9%)	38.4%
Neurosurgery	0.36	0.13 (0.2%)	36.1%
Obstetrics/Gynecology	6.95	0.40 (0.6%)	5.8%
Ophthalmology	12.29	7.63 (10.9%)	62.1%
Orthopedic Surgery	4.36	1.52 (2.2%)	34.9%
Otolaryngology	3.61	1.00 (1.4%)	27.7%
Plastic Surgery	1.53	0.45 (0.6%)	29.4%
Thoracic/Cardiovascular Surgery	0.69	0.39 (0.6%)	56.5%
Urology	2.83	1.47 (2.1%)	51.9%
TOTAL	216.29	70.25 (100%)	32.48%

- Consultations, assessments and visits represented almost two-thirds (62%) of all seniors' services (Fig. 3)
- General Practitioners were largely responsible for this area of care (e.g., 83% of all special calls)
- Specialists were primarily involved in the delivery of other services such as major surgical procedures (see below for an example)

FIGURE 3 – Proportion of seniors' services by broad NGS (2015/16). Source: CIHI (NPDB)

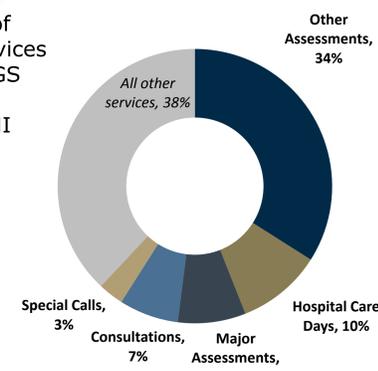
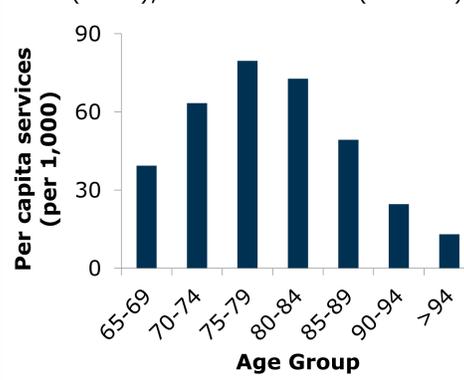


FIGURE 4 – Per capita services for cataract surgery (2015/2016). Source: CIHI (NPDB); Statistics Canada (CANSIM)



Ophthalmologists and Cataract Surgery

- Over half (52%) of all major surgeries for the elderly dealt with vision
- In 2015/16, cataract surgery had a 19 times higher per capita service rate for 65+ vs. <65
- Approximately 60% of Ophthalmologists provided cataract surgery to patients aged 65+.
- Per capita delivery of cataract surgery peaks among patients aged 75-79 (Fig. 4)

Policy Implications

- There are marked variations in how physician specialties care for the elderly. Certain disciplines provide high volumes of care (e.g., General Practitioner) while others focus more intensively on elder care (e.g., Geriatric Medicine).
- This new information can be used to inform and enhance medical education and workforce planning in response to the needs of Canada's aging population.
- A coordinated approach across specialties is required to ensure the best possible care for our aging population

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