



BRIDGING THE GAP

Enhancing Equitable Access & Innovation in Colorectal Cancer Care in Canada

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada delivers some of the highest-quality colorectal cancer (CRC) care globally, supported by organised provincial/territorial screening programmes, universal healthcare coverage, comprehensive diagnostic and treatment services, and strong research networks. CRC incidence remains among the top cancers, but mortality rates are declining due to early detection and high-quality treatment.

At **Level 5 maturity**, the policy focus is on improving timeliness, harmonising best practices across provinces, embedding precision medicine into standard pathways, and ensuring sustainability of funding for advanced technologies.

INTRODUCTION

Optimising a high-performing system

Canada's decentralised health system enables provinces and territories to tailor CRC programmes to population needs while maintaining national standards through the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (CPAC). Organised FIT-based screening, robust diagnostic infrastructure, and multidisciplinary cancer centres are widely available.

Key areas for improvement include reducing wait times for colonoscopy and treatment initiation, ensuring equitable access in rural/remote and Indigenous communities, and strengthening data integration for real-world evidence and personalised care.





COLORECTAL CANCER IN CANADA

Current Landscape and Strategic Gaps

Pillar	Current Status	Strength	Policy Action
Early Detection & Diagnosis	Provincial/territorial organised FIT screening for average-risk adults; colonoscopy capacity high but wait times vary.	Universal coverage, national guidelines, high public awareness.	Standardise FIT-positive follow-up timelines (<8 weeks), expand mobile/endoscopy outreach in underserved areas.
Biomarker & Molecular Testing	Routine MSI/MMR, RAS/BRAF testing; NGS and ctDNA available in major centres, often covered.	Strong academic molecular labs, national research collaboration.	Harmonise funding for NGS across provinces, build national molecular registry, evaluate clinical utility of ctDNA in surveillance.
Treatment Access	Universal access to surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, targeted agents, immunotherapy; advanced techniques widely available.	Multidisciplinary cancer centres, provincial drug funding programmes.	Expand robotic/laparoscopic expertise in smaller centres, accelerate pan-Canadian HTA for new therapies to reduce approval gaps.
Clinical Guidelines & Quality Standards	Evidence-based guidelines from national and provincial bodies; audit and quality improvement embedded in cancer agencies.	Strong integration of guidelines into practice.	Ensure real-time update processes for emerging therapies, expand participation in national quality indicator reporting.
Palliative & Survivorship Care	Comprehensive palliative services, survivorship planning integrated into cancer centres; variation in access in rural/remote regions.	Established hospice networks, rehabilitation and survivorship programmes.	Strengthen Indigenous-led palliative services, expand virtual survivorship programmes, integrate primary care follow-up.



CONCLUSION & Call to Action

Canada's CRC care system is advanced, equitable for most populations, and innovation-ready. The next stage requires removing provincial disparities in access, shortening diagnostic and treatment wait times, embedding precision oncology, and ensuring sustainability of funding for high-cost innovations.



KEY POLICY PRIORITIES

1 Harmonise access — ensure equitable availability of advanced diagnostics and treatments across provinces/territories.

2 Reduce wait times — implement national benchmarks for FIT-positive colonoscopy and treatment initiation.

3 Embed precision oncology — integrate genomic and liquid biopsy data into clinical pathways with national registries.

4 Strengthen rural/remote access — expand tele-oncology, mobile endoscopy, and Indigenous-led care models.

5 Sustain innovation funding — utilise pan-Canadian HTA and value-based agreements for costly new therapies.

CONCLUSION

At **Level 5 maturity**, Canada's focus is on optimising, harmonising, and sustaining a high-performing CRC system. Achieving equitable excellence across all regions will ensure continued improvements in survival, quality of life, and system efficiency.