



News Release

For Immediate Release

December 5, 2018

Most Pressing Cases Get Timely MRI and CT Scans—But Location a Key Factor in Wait Times: Auditor General

(TORONTO) Wait times for magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT) scans in Ontario were the lowest of six provinces where comparable data was available, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2018 Annual Report*, released today.

“We wanted to highlight that wait times for emergency and urgent cases were well within the targets set by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care,” Lysyk said after her Report was tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

“However, more remains to be done for patients assessed as semi-urgent and non-urgent. In addition, wait times also varied depending on where patients received care.”

MRI and CT scans provide physicians with important information for diagnosing and monitoring patients’ conditions. Timely, quality, medically necessary scans can help doctors to accurately diagnose and treat many diseases earlier in their course.

The number of MRI scans performed has increased by 17% and CT scans by more than 30% over the five years up to 2017/18 (excluding emergency cases because there was no requirement to collect this data before 2015). Of the 137 public hospitals in Ontario as of April 2018, 78 had at least one MRI or CT machine.

Among the other significant findings of the audit:

- MRI and CT machines could be operating more hours, thereby reducing wait times, but hospitals were financially unable to increase their operating hours for these machines. If all 108 MRI machines in Ontario hospitals, for example, had operated for 16 hours, seven days a week, hospitals would have outperformed Ministry wait-time targets.
- Wait times for MRI and CT scans vary depending on where the patient lives in Ontario, and the disparity in wait times was most significant for non-urgent patients. The Ministry has not analyzed why wait times vary significantly among the province’s 14 Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs). In 2017/18, 90% of non-urgent patients waited up to 203 days for an MRI in the LHIN with the longest wait times, compared to 63 days in the LHIN with the shortest wait times. The same year, 90% of non-urgent patients waited up to 127 days for a CT scan within the LHIN with the longest wait times, compared to 27 days in the LHIN with the shortest wait times.
- The Ministry has not reviewed its funding methods for MRI and CT scans, which have remained unchanged for over 10 years; nor has it incorporated into its funding method the actual cost-per-scan information self-reported by hospitals, individual hospitals’ demand and capacity, and the complexity of scans needed by patients.
- Province-wide peer review of MRI and CT scan results is not mandatory across Ontario hospitals. Lack of such reviews exposes patients and hospitals to the risk of misinterpretation of MRI and CT images and/or misdiagnosis. A 2013 review of one radiologist’s work at Trillium Health Partners uncovered issues related to over 640 CT scans, some of which involved undiagnosed cancers. The Ministry asked Health Quality Ontario to lead the implementation of a province-wide physician peer review program in all facilities with diagnostic imaging services, but progress has been slow.

- Hospitals' lack of user-friendly communications systems to allow patients to confirm receipt of their appointments, including emails and text messaging, contributed to patient no-shows. None of the four hospitals we audited routinely tracked reasons for no-shows.

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Read the [MRI and CT Scanning Services](#) audit report at www.auditor.on.ca

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