

Talking to patients about the surgery and diagnostic backlog

Patients are understandably upset and frustrated by longer wait lists and a lack of certainty about when they will get their surgery or diagnostic test. When you connect with patients who have faced cancellations or who are caught in the backlog, take an empathetic approach that also encourages patients to have their voice and concerns heard. Below you will find a template, which you can adapt for use in your practice.

Sample Patient Message (adapt as needed)

Your surgery/test is delayed because of the enormous backlog that has accumulated during the pandemic.

I understand the wait list is long. While this is frustrating for me, I know it must be more frustrating and difficult for you. As a physician, I am not able to get my patients in faster without more capacity in our health system. Wait lists are being managed based on patient urgency and date of referral. If you feel your situation has changed, please contact your doctor to review your situation. If your situation becomes an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest ER or urgent care centre.

Physicians have been advocating for a plan to address this backlog, and reduce wait times for patients like you who are unfairly affected by this issue. While all provinces have seen some surgeries and diagnostic tests cancelled during the pandemic, Manitoba has been particularly hard hit. This situation was created partly because of the pandemic response, but also because our health care system was not prepared to handle the surge in COVID-19 patient admissions. This has led to surgeries and diagnostic tests being disrupted more than other in many other provinces.

Physicians are ready to pick up extra surgeries and tests to help the province catch up, but the health system still lacks the capacity and resources needed to make this happen.

Doctors Manitoba, our professional association, is doing everything it can to advocate for more capacity. We have successfully pushed for the government to create a task force charged with clearing the backlog, and hope this will result in shorter wait times very soon. Doctors Manitoba is monitoring the backlog and progress to address it at DoctorsManitoba.ca/backlog.

If you are frustrated by the wait, please consider contacting your MLA or the Minister of Health to share your story and express your support for an urgent solution to this massive issue.