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Four in 10 Canadian Children Facing Unsafe Delays for Spinal Surgery

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Children's Healthcare Canada and The Conference Board of Canada release the first of three reports on the costs of an underfunded pediatric system

Ottawa, Ontario, September 25, 2023 – Extended wait times for screening, diagnostics and treatment for children can have severe repercussions on the health and well-being outcomes for Canada's youth. *No Child Elects to Wait*, a new report for Children's Healthcare Canada by The Conference Board of Canada, finds that overdrawn timelines add significantly to healthcare system costs, and negatively impact children's health outcomes.

Canada has historically underinvested in children's health and well-being compared to peer nations. We spend less on policies related to children and youth (only 1.68 per cent of GDP, versus other countries that spend 3.68 per cent of GDP), and this is reflected in our health outcomes.

No Child Elects to Wait states that the clinically recommended time frame for pediatric spinal surgery is six months, based on expert consensus. However, the report finds that in Canada, four in 10 pediatric spinal surgeries are completed after the recommended clinical time frame. This delay is costing Canada's healthcare systems \$44.6 million.

"This research series highlights the need for strategic and sustained investments across the continuum of children's healthcare systems to make sure children and youth across Canada receive the care they deserve, when they need it and where they need it," says Emily Gruenwoldt, President and CEO of Children's Healthcare Canada. "Children's Healthcare Canada thanks The Conference Board for helping put a price tag on the delays our children experience accessing essential healthcare."

"Wait lists and surgery backlogs in pediatrics have persisted for many years and were aggravated by COVID-19, which strained healthcare in Canada and globally," according to Chad Leaver, Director, Health and Human Capital, at The Conference Board of Canada. "While surgery volumes have improved, we won't see a meaningful reduction in the backlog until surgeries are performed at a greater pace than before the pandemic."

Wait times for surgeries that extend past the recommended time frame can result in disease progression and adverse, potentially irreversible effects, according to *No Child Elects to Wait*. The research recommends investing in Canada's perioperative workforce with pediatric expertise, increasing surgical capacity, prioritizing surgeries postponed amid COVID-19 and adopting single-entry referral processes and Canada-wide standardized reporting on wait times for pediatric surgery.

This three-part research series examines whether Canada's healthcare systems are well-positioned to meet the current and future health and well-being needs of Canadian children and youth. The first report, released today, focuses on pediatric spinal surgery for scoliosis. The second report looks at timely access to autism spectrum disorder (ASD) services and supports, and the third focuses on timely access to mental health services. The ASD and mental health reports will be released sequentially in the fall of 2023.

No Child Elects to Wait is accessible at the link [here](#). To access healthcare professionals, please contact Children's Healthcare Canada.

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About Children's Healthcare Canada

Children's Healthcare Canada is the national association representing organizations providing health services to children and youth across the continuum of care. With the combined strength of our members, we advance collective strategic priorities to inform the development of innovative and integrated health systems for Canada's eight million children and youth.

About The Conference Board of Canada

The Conference Board of Canada is the country's leading independent research organization. Since 1954, The Conference Board of Canada has been providing research that supports evidence-based decision making to solve Canada's toughest problems.