

Heart & Stroke hypertension news release key messages and backgrounder [for media](#)

For release October 18, 2022

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1. Top take-aways

- **Hypertension is the on-ramp to stroke and heart disease.**
 - High blood pressure is the #1 risk factor for stroke and a major risk factor for heart disease. Preventing and managing high blood pressure will reduce stroke and heart disease.
 - High blood pressure affects almost eight million adults in Canada¹ and this number will continue to rise as the population ages and more people are being diagnosed at an earlier age.
- **Health professionals are worried about increasing rates and risks of high blood pressure.**
 - A survey of almost 1,000 health professionals in Canada revealed significant concern about high blood pressure including lack of awareness and understanding by the public, inequities for those at highest risk, lack of support for detection and management, and further challenges to hypertension prevention and control due to pandemic disruptions.
 - Treatment and control of high blood pressure has decreased over 10 years, especially for women.^{2,3}
 - The health professional survey also highlighted key areas to improve hypertension prevention, detection and control.
- **High blood pressure can be better prevented, detected and controlled in Canada yet not enough is being done.**
 - Improvements can be made including better awareness and education, ensuring access to regular care and follow up with health professionals, more routine blood pressure screening in the community, better prevention, and addressing the social determinants of health.
 - Heart & Stroke is working actively in this area by funding research, raising awareness, providing information and resources to support people to know and control their blood pressure, advocating for and supporting change across health systems including through Canadian Stroke Best Practice Guidelines, and working in partnerships across the country with key stakeholders such as Hypertension Canada.

¹ [Canadian Chronic Disease Surveillance System](#)

² Leung AA, Bell A, Tsuyuki RT, Campbell NRC. Refocusing on hypertension control in Canada. *CMAJ*. 2021;193(23):E854-E855. doi:10.1503/cmaj.210140

³ Leung AA, Williams JVA, McAlister FA, et al. Worsening Hypertension Awareness, Treatment, and Control Rates in Canadian Women Between 2007 and 2017. *Canadian Journal of Cardiology*. 2020;36(5):732-739. doi:10.1016/j.cjca.2020.02.092

2. Key messages and supporting facts

1. High blood pressure (hypertension) is a significant and growing health issue. It affects millions of Canadians and puts them at high risk for stroke and heart disease

- High blood pressure is the #1 risk factor for stroke and a major risk factor for heart disease.
- Almost eight million adults in Canada have high blood pressure. This number will only rise with the growing aging population and more people being diagnosed with high blood pressure at a younger age.
- High blood pressure affects approximately one in four adults in Canada.⁴
- High blood pressure is often described as the ‘silent killer’ because there are usually no warning symptoms and people do not realize when they develop it.
- The annual cost associated with high blood pressure in Canada is \$13.9 billion⁵.
- Some studies have revealed an increase in lifestyle risk factors during the pandemic such as increased physical inactivity in youth^{6,7} and adults⁸ and some increases in processed food consumption⁹.
- Some groups in Canada are disproportionately at risk for high blood pressure including women over age 65, people of South Asian descent and Black Canadians¹⁰.

2. Preventing and controlling high blood pressure is very effective for reducing stroke and heart disease, yet not enough is being done

- Treating high blood pressure is highly effective for reducing cardiovascular disease and preventing disability and death yet treatment and control of high blood pressure has decreased over 10 years, especially for women. (2007-2017)

3. Health professionals are very worried about the increasing rates and risks of high blood pressure coupled with lack of awareness, prevention, detection and treatment but they have identified solutions for moving forward.

According to a national survey of 1,000 health professionals, conducted by Heart & Stroke*:

High blood pressure is a serious condition

⁴ [Canadian Chronic Disease Surveillance System](#)

⁵ Weaver CG, Clement FM, Campbell NRC, et al. Healthcare Costs Attributable to Hypertension: Canadian Population-Based Cohort Study. *Hypertension*. 2015;66(3):502-508. doi:10.1161/HYPERTENSIONAHA.115.05702

⁶ Government of Canada Statistics Canada. *The Unequal Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Physical Activity Habits of Canadians*.; 2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2022005/article/00003-eng.htm>

⁷ Tao CS, Zhu L, Strudwick G, et al. The impact of physical activity on mental health outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Science Briefs of the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table*. 2022;3(62). <https://covid19-scienceable.ca/sciencebrief/the-impact-of-physical-activity-on-mental-health-outcomes-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁸ <https://santemontreal.qc.ca/en/public/coronavirus-covid-19/situation-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-in-montreal/survey-of-the-health/lifestyle-habits/>

⁹ Bergeron A, Durette G. *The Diet of Adults in Québec and Canada in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic. A Report from INSPQ Public Health Expertise and Reference Centre*.; 2022. <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/publications/3180-alimentation-adultes-contexte-pandemie-covid-19>

¹⁰ Rana A, de Souza RJ, Kandasamy S, Lear SA, Anand SS. Cardiovascular risk among South Asians living in Canada: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *CMAJ Open*. 2014;2(3):E183-191. doi:10.9778/cmajo.20130064
Chiu M, Austin PC, Manuel DG, Tu JV. Comparison of cardiovascular risk profiles among ethnic groups using population health surveys between 1996 and 2007. *CMAJ*. 2010;182(8):E301-E310. doi:10.1503/cmaj.091676
Gasevic D, Ross ES, Lear SA. Ethnic Differences in Cardiovascular Disease Risk Factors: A Systematic Review of North American Evidence. *Can J Cardiol*. 2015;31(9):1169-1179. doi:10.1016/j.cjca.2015.06.017

- Eight in 10 health professionals are worried that high blood pressure is the number one risk factor for stroke and a major risk factor for heart disease and almost half are extremely worried about this.
- Seven in 10 health professionals are worried that those who are at highest risk for high blood pressure are often those who face inequities, including barriers to treatment and support and, of these, four in 10 are extremely worried.
- Seven in ten health professionals are worried that people are developing high blood pressure at an earlier age than previously.
- Six in 10 health professionals are worried that high blood pressure is often the result of unhealthy behaviours.

Lack of awareness and understanding around high blood pressure is putting Canadians at risk.

- More than seven in 10 health professionals are worried that people do not realize when they develop high blood pressure because there are usually no warning signs, and that they do not understand what it is or the risks associated with it.
- Studies have shown that awareness is lowest among younger adults¹¹

There are not enough services and supports in place to detect, monitor and manage blood pressure in Canada.

- Seven in 10 health professionals are worried about the lack of high blood pressure screening practices, including due to the loss of the annual health exam and education to the public.
- Six in 10 health professionals are worried that high blood pressure is not being adequately treated and controlled.

Disruptions to people’s lives and ability to access healthcare during the pandemic have had a negative impact on Canadians’ blood pressure.

- More than eight in 10 health professionals believe lifestyle risk factors that negatively affect blood pressure have increased due to the pandemic and more than six in 10 believe equity deserving groups are facing an even greater increase.
- Eight in 10 health professionals are afraid there has been an increase in undiagnosed new cases and that more people with existing high blood pressure have not been adequately managing and controlling their condition due to the pandemic.
- Over half of health professionals are concerned that more people have developed high blood pressure than would have normally been the case during the pandemic. The top reasons cited for this increase include
 - increased lifestyle risk factors (eg inactivity, unhealthy eating, smoking, alcohol consumption)
 - Not having regular in-person check-ups
 - Increase in stress
 - Inability to prioritize existing health conditions due to other challenges and concerns.

Solutions: High blood pressure can be better prevented, detected and controlled in Canada.

- Health professionals identified several key areas to best support people who have or are at risk of developing high blood pressure:
 - Ensure access to regular care and follow up with health professionals.
 - Ensure access to routine blood pressure screening in the community and/or by primary care including pharmacists and community paramedicine.
 - Address the social determinants of health (eg, education, literacy, income, shelter, social supports, access to nutritious foods and physical activity).
 - Increase public awareness of the importance of monitoring blood pressure.
 - Ensure access to culturally safe and appropriate lifestyle modification programs and supports.

¹¹ Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. *Blood Pressure and Hypertension.*; 2019. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2019002/article/00002-eng.htm>

- Ensure universal access to medication, including high blood pressure medications.

* Online survey carried out June 20 – August 3, 2022, of 982 health professionals (nurses, paramedics/first responders, physicians, rehabilitation specialists, researchers, health system leaders, educators and therapists.) The survey was conducted in English and French in cooperation with Environics Research and was promoted using a variety of targeted measures including through Heart & Stroke professional partners, associations and other stakeholders.

4. Tips and tools for preventing and managing high blood pressure

Some factors that influence blood pressure cannot be controlled such as age, ethnicity, family history and gender, but there are actions everyone can take to prevent and manage high blood pressure.

- Know your numbers – check or get your blood pressure checked regularly.
- If you are diagnosed with high blood pressure and prescribed medication, take them as prescribed.

The following behaviours are important for staying healthy and preventing high blood pressure and subsequent heart disease and stroke:

- Be active for at least 150 minutes per week
- Eat as healthy as possible including lots of vegetables and fruit, whole grains and protein foods and limit highly processed foods and avoid sugary drinks.
- Be smoke-free.
- If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to small amounts.
- Manage your stress.

Links

- Heart & Stroke blood pressure program in the *PC Health App*. <https://www.pchealth.ca/>
- Choose a home blood pressure monitor that has been clinically validated to be accurate by [Hypertension Canada](#). They also have useful tips to help you find the device that is right for you.
- Watch Heart & Stroke’s [How to measure your blood pressure at home](#) video.
- The [DASH diet](#) has been scientifically shown to lower blood pressure.
- Heart & Stroke’s Canadian Stroke Best Practices Recommendations for blood pressure and stroke prevention at <https://www.strokebestpractices.ca/recommendations/secondary-prevention-of-stroke/blood-pressure-and-stroke-prevention>.
- Hypertension Canada’s information for the public: <https://hypertension.ca/hypertension-and-you/>
- Visit heartandstroke.ca for more information and resources.

3. Definitions

Blood pressure is a measure of the pressure or force of blood against the blood vessel walls (arteries). Blood pressure reading is based on two measures: the top number (systolic) is the measure of the pressure when the heart contracts and pushes blood through the arteries. The bottom (diastolic) number is the measure of the pressure when the heart relaxes and fills with blood between beats.

High blood pressure (hypertension) is when the blood pressure in the arteries rises and the heart has to work harder than normal to pump blood through the blood vessels.

Blood pressure categories.

| Category | Systolic/Diastolic |
|-------------|--------------------|
| Low risk | 120 / 80 |
| Medium risk | 121-134 / 80-84 |

| | |
|-----------|------------|
| High risk | 135+ / 85+ |
|-----------|------------|

4. Heart & Stroke social handles and links

Twitter

- **EN:** @HeartandStroke (<https://twitter.com/HeartandStroke>)
- **FR:** @coeuretavc (<https://twitter.com/coeuretavc>)

Facebook

- **EN:** @heartandstroke <https://www.facebook.com/heartandstroke>
- **FR:** @coeuretavc (<https://www.facebook.com/coeuretavc>)

Instagram

- @heartandstroke (<https://www.instagram.com/heartandstroke/>)

LinkedIn

- @heartandstroke (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/heart-and-stroke>)