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## Ontario Lowering Eligibility Age for Life-Saving Colon Cancer Screening

Everyone 45 years of age and older will be eligible to access publicly funded colorectal cancer screening as of July 1

The Ontario government is lowering the eligibility age to allow people to access publicly funded colorectal cancer screening to help more people receive life-saving screening services sooner. Starting July 1, the eligibility age will be lowered from 50 to 45 for all individuals and to 40 for those at increased risk. This historic expansion will give more than one million additional people the option to connect to life-saving screening services to detect and treat colorectal cancer sooner.

"Colorectal cancer is one of the most commonly diagnosed cancers in Canada, with rates rising among younger people," said Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "That's why we are taking this critical step to connect more than one million younger Ontarians to detection and treatment as early as possible, so that they can get the care they need, when and where they need it." Research has shown that lowering the screening age is critical to detecting colorectal cancer earlier, when it is at its

most treatable. Under the current model, patients under 50 need to get a referral following an examination or the signs of symptoms, to access a screening. By lowering the age of eligibility, more than one million Ontarians will now be able to easily access life-saving screening by calling their health care provider or Health811, who will provide them directly with a test without the need of a referral. Ontarians under 40 who, following an examination, receive a referral from a doctor will also continue to access publicly funded screening through the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). Beginning July 1, eligible people across Ontario ages 45-49 will start to receive letters from the ColonCancerCheck program to help them connect to an initial colorectal cancer screening test. Eligible individuals without a primary care provider can also access the test by calling Health811 at 866-797-0007. In the case of abnormal test results, the patient's doctor, nurse practitioner or Ontario Health will contact them to provide support and schedule a follow-up colonoscopy. People at increased risk, meaning they have one first-

degree relative (parent, sibling or child) with colorectal cancer diagnosed before age 60 or more than one relative diagnosed with colorectal cancer at any age, will be eligible for a publicly funded screening at age 40 or 10 years earlier than the youngest age a relative was diagnosed.

This expanded eligibility builds on the province's previous actions to lower the age of self-referral to mammograms to 40, connecting an additional one million women to important screening services to detect and treat breast cancer sooner. Since coming into effect in Fall 2024, more than 280,000 women have been screened through self-referral.

As part of Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care, the Ontario government continues to expand access to critical services and innovative treatments ensuring more people receive the right care, including faster access to life-saving cancer therapies, where and when they need it, closer to home.

ColonCancerCheck currently performs over 780,000 FITs each year. Colorectal cancer is the

fourth most common type of cancer diagnosed in Ontario. It is also the second most common cause of cancer death among Ontario men and the third most common cause of cancer death for women. When colon cancer is found early, 9 out of every 10 people with the disease can be cured.

Ontario is fast-tracking access to eight new breakthrough cancer drugs, including one that treats colorectal cancer, through the Funding Accelerated for Specific Treatments program.

"The evidence is clear: colorectal cancer rates are rising globally and across Canada, and earlier screening saves lives. Lowering the screening age to 45 is an evidence-based decision that will help detect precancerous disease earlier and diagnose cancers when treatment is most effective. This is an important step forward for improving outcomes for patients and families, and we commend the Ontario government's leadership in advancing prevention-focused care."

- Dr. Kevin Smith  
President and CEO, University Health Network

"What we are seeing in practice is a real shift, with col-

orectal cancer increasingly affecting younger adults. That reality makes it clear that the future of cancer care is prevention and early detection, before disease becomes more advanced or harder to treat. Earlier screening gives us the chance to intervene sooner and fundamentally change the trajectory for patients."

- Dr. Sami Chadi  
Site Lead, Gastrointestinal Surgical Oncology Program, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

"In-Common Laboratories (ICL) commends the Ontario Government for lowering the colorectal cancer screening age from 50 to 45 as of July 1st. This change will enable more Ontarians to gain access to the fecal immunochemical screening test (FIT). As a Canadian, not-for-profit medical laboratory company, we are proud to work with the government to ensure that more Ontarians can benefit from cancer screening and timely, preventative care."

- Isaac Gould  
Chief Executive Officer, In-Common Laboratories

"Ontario's decision to lower the screening age to 45 for average-risk individuals reflects what the evidence

has been telling us for years—colorectal cancer is increasingly affecting younger adults. We commend Ontario for taking this important step, joining Prince Edward Island in leading the way. Through our #ScreenAt45 campaign, we're urging every province and territory to follow suit so Canadians everywhere can benefit from earlier detection."

- Barry Stein  
President and CEO, Colorectal Cancer Canada

"As colorectal cancer increasingly affects younger Canadians, lowering the screening age will help find more cancers earlier, when treatment is more likely to be successful. We applaud Ontario's decision to lower the screening age to 45, a move that will improve health outcomes and save lives. As Canada's largest province, and the second to make this change, we hope this builds momentum and sets a strong example for other jurisdictions across the country to follow Ontario's lead."

- Dr. Stuart Edmonds  
Executive Vice President, Mission, Research and Advocacy, Canadian Cancer Society

## Ontario Continues to Protect Health-Care Workforce

Two postsecondary nursing programs in the Peterborough area are now eligible for the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant

The Ontario government is continuing to deliver on its commitment to protect the province's health-care system by expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant (OLSG) to include two additional nursing programs in eastern Ontario. Building on the success of OLSG with an additional \$14 million investment, 1,500 students participating in nursing programs at Trent University and Sir Sandford Fleming College will be able to have their tuition, books and other education costs fully covered this fall if they commit to working in eastern Ontario after graduation. This further bolsters Ontario's highly skilled health-care workforce, helping more people conveniently connect to care, close to home. "Our government is taking historic steps in building our homegrown health-care workforce that train, stay, and build their careers in the communities that need them most," said Nolan Quinn, Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security. "By expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant to Peterborough and the surrounding communities, we are removing financial barriers for students and supporting the future nurses that will connect more people to care in eastern Ontario."

The Ontario Learn and Stay Grant covers tuition, books and other direct educational costs for students in nursing, paramedics and lab technologist programs in high need areas of the province who commit to working in the region where they studied after graduation. To date, the Ontario government has provided over \$175 million through OLSG to support nearly 13,000 learners, including nearly \$54 million to train over 4,000 future health-care workers in the eastern region. Applications for Fall 2026 are now open, students can learn more about the grant application, as well as information about other eligible programs and regions, at [ontario.ca/learnandstay](http://ontario.ca/learnandstay). "By expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant to the Peterborough area, our government is building on the success of this program to train the next generation of our health-care workforce," said Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "With 1,500 more nursing students eligible for free tuition, this means more frontline health-care workers providing world-class care in the communities that need them most."

The Ontario Learn and Stay Grant is a critical part of the Ontario government's plan to protect the province's health-care system and highly skilled workforce to ensure people and their families have access to high-quality health care, close to home.

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