

Heart & Stroke

Heart and brain health: Health professionals' perspectives on progress and what else needs to be done

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About the survey

To gain insights into heart and brain health, including progress over the past 75 years and efforts needed going forward, Heart & Stroke, in partnership with Environics Research, conducted a national survey of health professionals who specialize in heart- and brain-related health issues and research.

A total of 1,031 health professionals participated in the online survey, and data were collected between June 22 and August 5, 2026. Respondents included nurses, doctors, researchers, healthcare administrators and system leaders, rehabilitation specialists and other allied health professionals.

Top take-aways

- Canadian health professionals say earlier identification and treatment of medical risk factors and improvements to treatments are the biggest drivers of the 80% decline in the death rate from heart disease and stroke over the past 75 years.
- Building on this progress, health professionals say that better and more equitable access to healthcare services are the highest priorities for future gains, followed by earlier identification and treatment of medical risk factors, healthy public policies and getting kids off to a healthy start.
- Health professionals expect future breakthroughs to come from advancements in diagnosis and treatment, followed by ones in prevention and risk factors.
- Assuming ongoing and stable research funding, health professionals most frequently identified translating research into real-world, measurable improvements in prevention, care and recovery when asked about the factors that could have the biggest impact on improving heart and brain health.
- Virtually all health professionals believe that more research on heart disease and stroke is important to Canadians' heart and brain health.

Key messages

Better treatments and medical risk factor management drove decades of progress

- The death rate from heart disease and stroke has decreased by more than 80% over the past 75 years.
- According to our poll of health professionals, identification and treatment of medical risk factors, improvements to treatments and increased public awareness around medical emergencies have been the greatest contributors to the decreased death rate for heart disease and stroke over the past 75 years.
 - More than six in 10 health professionals (64%) cited earlier identification and treatment of medical risk factors, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol, while an equal proportion (64%) cited better treatments for heart disease and stroke, including surgical procedures and medications, as among the top factors responsible for the considerable decrease in the death rate from these conditions.
 - Half of health professionals (49%) identified increased public awareness around recognizing medical emergencies such as heart attack, stroke and cardiac arrest and knowing what action to take as among the top reasons for the decrease in the death rate from heart disease and stroke over the past 75 years.



Access to care and risk factor management are top priorities for the future

- The burden of heart disease and stroke remains high: More than six million people are living with heart disease and stroke, and they are the cause of one in five deaths in Canada.
- According to our poll of health professionals, better and more equitable access to healthcare services, earlier identification and treatment of medical risk factors, healthy public policies and getting kids off to a healthy start are the highest priorities for further improving heart and brain health.
 - Almost half of health professionals (46%) identified better access to healthcare services and more than one in three (35%) identified more equitable access to healthcare, regardless of geography, age, income, sex/gender, or ethnicity/race, as among the top three priorities for further improving heart and brain health.
 - Almost one in three health professionals (32%) indicated earlier identification and treatment of medical risk factors (such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol) as among the top priorities.
 - About three in 10 health professionals (31%) noted the importance of government policies, laws and regulations that support healthy lifestyle choices (healthy eating, physical activity, being smoke-free) as among the top priorities and a similar number (29%) noted increasing focus on ensuring children and youth have the healthiest start possible as a priority.

Biggest research breakthroughs expected in diagnosis and treatment

- When health professionals were asked to predict the biggest research breakthroughs in the next 10 to 20 years when it comes to heart and brain health, advancements in diagnosis and treatment topped the list, followed by prevention and risk factors.
 - More than four in 10 health professionals (43%) identified areas related to new or improved diagnosis and treatment as future research breakthroughs.
 - Two in 10 health professionals (20%) pointed to advances related to prevention and risk factors as future research breakthroughs.
 - More than one in 10 health professionals (12%) noted precision, personalized medicine, genetics/disease biology/mechanisms as contributing factors to future research breakthroughs.
 - More than one in 10 health professionals (12%) also noted technology, data, AI and digital health as enablers to achieving the next research breakthroughs across the continuum, for example AI for prediction and early detection in high-risk patients or continued monitoring of high blood pressure or AI-guided rehabilitation.

Translating research into real-world impact is critical

- Assuming research funding is ongoing and stable, health professionals most frequently identified translating research into real-world, measurable improvements in prevention, care and recovery as the factor that could have the biggest impact on improving heart and brain health.
 - Almost eight in 10 health professionals (76%) identified more focus on translating research into real-world, measurable improvements in prevention, care and recovery (such as health systems change, public awareness) as one of the top three factors.
 - More than four in 10 health professionals (43%) identified clearly communicating research results and impact to broader audiences, including the general public, as a top three factor.
 - One in three health professionals (34%) identified a robust research talent pipeline, including training, early-career support, retention across career stages and growing the number and diversity of researchers, as a top three key factor.

Health professionals place high value on research into heart disease and stroke

- Virtually all survey respondents said more research is important to Canadians' heart and brain health.
 - 99% said more research on heart disease and stroke, including prevention, causes, diagnosis, treatment and care, was important.

Visit heartandstroke.ca for more information and resources.



Additional stats and facts

- The death rate from heart disease and stroke has decreased by more than 80% since 1950 or over the past seven decades.
- More than six million people across the country of all ages, ethnicities and genders are living with heart disease or stroke.
- Heart conditions and stroke are a leading cause of death in Canada.
- 1 in 5 deaths in Canada are caused by heart conditions or stroke. That's a life taken every 7 minutes.
- Since 1952, Heart & Stroke has invested more than \$1.73 billion in heart disease and stroke research, making us one of the largest contributors in Canada after the federal government.

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