

# Tell Me Where It Hurts

*Medical care in Canada* GIANCARLO LA GIORGIA

We all bemoan the state of this country's health care when we're waiting in the queue, but what do the numbers say? Read on for a snapshot.

**CHUNK OF CHANGE** According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), health-care spending is expected to reach \$171.9 billion for 2008, or \$5,170 per Canadian — an increase of \$10.3 billion over estimated expenditures for 2007, for a growth of 6.4%.

**CHUNK OF PRODUCTIVITY** CIHI also notes that health expenditure for 2008 will reach 10.7% of the gross domestic product, the highest share ever recorded.

**WHERE DOES IT ALL GO?** CIHI reports that hospitals account for the largest share of health-care dollars (28%, or \$48.1 billion). But for 2008, spending on drugs is expected to have grown at a faster rate (8.3%) than spending on either hospitals (5.8%) or physicians (6.2%).

**THE DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW** According to the Fraser Institute, a Canadian seeking surgery or other treatment in 2007 waited a median of 18.3 weeks between seeing a family doctor and receiving the required surgery or specialized treatment. That dropped to 17.3 weeks in 2008.

**COMPARING QUEUES** As of 2008, overall wait times were shortest in Ontario, at 13.3 weeks, and longest in Saskatchewan, at 28.2 weeks.

**STILL WAITING** Only 22% of 12,000 Canadians surveyed by the Commonwealth Fund in 2007 said they could get a same-day appointment when sick. Almost a third had to wait six days or more, and 15% reported waits of six months or more for non-emergency surgery.

**NOT-SO-FREE CARE** In the same survey, 12% of Canadians reported skipping some form of care in the past year because of cost-related issues. The figure for the U.S. was 37% — the highest among developed countries surveyed.

**WELL CARED FOR** In the poll, an encouraging 91% of Canadians reported that they had a regular physician or place of health care.

**TIME FOR A CHANGE** According to 60% of respondents in the 2007 survey, Canada's system needs fundamental changes, with 12% saying it should be rebuilt completely.

**IMAGE PROBLEM** According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Canada had 11.2 CT scanners per million people in 2005, compared with the U.S.'s 32.2 and Japan's 92.6. It had 5.5 MRIs per million, compared with the U.S.'s 26.6 and Japan's 40.1. The OECD country averages for these two imaging devices were 20.6 and 9.8, respectively. 

