

Investing in Laboratory Health Human Resources

The Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario (MLPAO) is a non-profit health professional organization founded in 1963 with members across the province, advocating on behalf of Medical Laboratory Technologists (MLTs) and Medical Laboratory Assistant/Technicians (MLA/Ts). **Combined, Ontario medical laboratory professionals process and interpret 280+ million lab tests annually and are the fourth largest healthcare profession after doctors, nurses, and pharmacists.**

MLPAO has three main recommendations for the Ontario government to include in the 2023 Budget to invest in the province's medical labs.

Our Recommendations:

1. \$3.6M (over three years) for a Laboratory Externship Program

Estimated funding is based on the costs of hiring clinical placement students for **three years at \$6000/student for a total of 200 students each year (600 students total).**

2. \$2.6M (over three years) for a Northern Health Program

This will support healthcare in rural and remote communities as part of a **targeted recruitment and retention strategy** and will complement the funding that MLT students at Cambrian College and St. Clair College are eligible to apply for through the **Ontario Learn and Stay Grant.**

3. Funding for an Ontario Simulation Laboratory

Simulation-based learning will allow students to **complete some disciplines by simulation and the remainder of their clinical placement in a clinical lab** which will increase the number of labs able to take students for clinical placement. Further research is being conducted to determine the capital investments required and potential industry stakeholder partnerships to support this recommendation.



MLT Intake

Ontario Tech University
Michener Institute
Cambrian College
St. Clair College
St. Lawrence College
Anderson College

400 to 500 potential students are on a waitlist



Placement

70% of labs are short staffed and can't effectively train students during their five-to-eight-month placement

Understaffed labs need to focus on testing — not students



Entering Workforce

250 to 300 new professionals ready to be licenced per year

Current shortage of **401** MLTs



Intake vs. Demand

MLTs are leaving the workforce
2019 = 6,356
2020 = 6,258
2021 = 6,175
2022 = ?

Not enough MLTs **entering the workforce**

The Need to Expand Clinical Placements

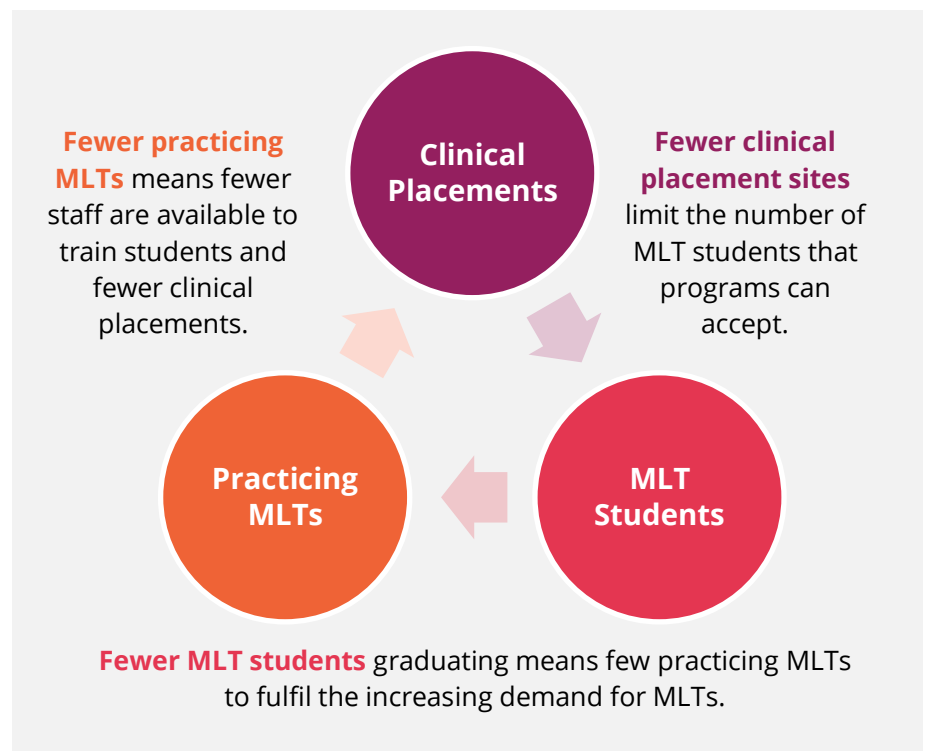
Data from the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development indicates an increase in MLT postings at a **rate of 16.68% in the last five years**. Data from laboratory employers reflects this change, with **401 open MLT positions reported by 120 worksites**. Students must study full-time in an accredited, post-secondary Medical Laboratory Science Program for 2.5 – 4 years. After graduating, candidates must pass a certification exam with the Canadian Society of Medical Laboratory Science and register with the College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Ontario. While the new programs at Anderson and Conestoga Colleges will help to train more MLTs, the ones entering the workforce are not enough to fill the vacancies and despite best efforts the workload of MLTs is unmanageable.¹

The Impact of MLT Shortages

70% of all medical decisions rely on lab results and there is a significant testing demand due to an aging population, expansion of preventive medicine, and new pathogens. The College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Ontario's data shows **41% of MLTs will be in the eligible to retire category in the next 2-4 years** at the age of 55 and will be eligible for the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan.² Further action is required to address the massive health human resource shortages that labs face. Rural and remote communities are particularly impacted by the shortage in this workforce. 26% of postings for all MLTs across Ontario are in rural and remote labs, despite rural populations representing just 13.8% of the total population of Ontario.³ This is notably higher compared to the vacancy rate of 7% for large urban hospitals.

Health human resource shortages mean delays in turnaround time, lengthened hospital stays, and duplicate appointments with family doctors. Without intervention, **ongoing MLT shortages could cost taxpayers over \$1.6 billion dollars annually and negatively impact patient health.**

Employers struggle to commit resources to train clinical placement students while understaffed even though they express a desire to train new MLTs. This limits placement sites, restricting seats in MLT programs, which in turn reduces numbers of practicing MLTs, intensifying the staffing shortage.



¹ [MLPAO Call to Action](#)

² [2021 CMLTO Annual Report](#)

³ [Supplemental Report: MLP in Crisis – Post Omicron](#)

Recommendation 1: 2023-2026 Laboratory Externship Program - \$3.6M (total over three years)

Clinical placements (externship) are a major roadblock for both laboratories and training programs, making this a target area to alleviate MLT shortages. MLPAO is currently working with stakeholders such as hospitals and community labs to best determine how funding should be allocated based on the unique needs of different regions/sectors across the province.

Schools are required to find a clinical placement for every student which limits the number of individuals they can train. These educational institutes could train more people with financial supports for labs to focus on training future MLTs and resources to assist with their other lab responsibilities. 86% of labs surveyed⁴ state they experience barriers to take clinical placements students for the following reasons:

- 40% are unable to provide training in all five disciplines, 36% cited time, 9% cited recruitment which are all factors in their ability to train students
- 33% of respondents indicated they experience more than one barrier for clinical placements

Estimated funding is based on the costs of hiring clinical placement students for **three years at \$6000/student for a total of 200 students each year (600 students total)**. This will help to alleviate shortages in the near term.

Recommendation 2: 2023-2026 Northern Health Program Laboratory - \$2.6M (over three years)

Rural and remote areas are most impacted by this shortage, necessitating a **targeted recruitment and retention strategy** to support healthcare in these communities. This will complement the **Ontario Learn and Stay Grant** for prospective MLT students at Cambrian College and St. Clair College.

Recommendation 3: 2024 Develop Ontario Simulation Laboratory

There is a need for more simulation-based learning in the Ontario labs sector. **Many labs do not have the five specialty areas of lab medicine that students are required to complete during clinical placement** and are thereby limited or excluded from taking students for clinical placement. This is especially true in mid-sized urban, rural, and remote labs.

Simulation-based learning will allow students to complete some disciplines by simulation and the remainder of their clinical placement in a clinical lab which will increase the number of labs able to take students for clinical placement. This will help to enhance student learning while decreasing the need for lengthy apprenticeships. Further research is being conducted to determine the capital investments required and potential industry stakeholder partnerships to support this recommendation.

For more information, please contact:

Michelle Hoad
Chief Executive Officer
mhoad@mlpao.org
416-485-6768 x 225

⁴ [Research Initiative: Clinical Placements and the Shortage of MLTs](#)