

Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario

Supplemental Report: Medical Laboratory Professionals in Crisis – Post Omicron

Medical laboratory professionals have been the backbone of the COVID-19 crisis. Ontario laboratories are experiencing severe burnout after two-plus years of intensive COVID-19 testing, the resumption of surgeries and catching up on testing from millions of Ontarians that are now more comfortable to visit healthcare centers and get tests.

The MLPAO conducted a survey in Summer 2022 to better understand the current staffing challenges facing Ontario labs. Currently, 41.3% of MLTs in Ontario are approaching retirement. This represents a large cohort of laboratory professionals who we have no way of adequately replacing¹. According to the CDC, 70% of medical decisions rely on laboratory results. Medical laboratory professionals impact all aspects of patient care, from emergency rooms to family medicine to mental health.

Overview:

- 401 open MLT positions down from 466 in 2021 (retired members returned to work)
- 26% of open positions are in Rural and Remote areas
- 66% stated shortages are affecting testing turnaround times
- 86% of job openings are unfilled for longer than 3 months

MLPAO's Call to Action must be addressed immediately.

- There is a critical shortage of Medical Laboratory Technologists in the province of Ontario. The average number of students entering the professional each year is approximately 250-300.¹ Programs vary from 3-4 years in length.² There is a waitlist at each MLT program.² The need for 401 MLTs equates to at least two full completed MLTs programs which would take 6 to 8 years.
- The shortage of 401 MLTs means that 17.5M lab tests are NOT being performed. The Call to Action proposed by the MLPAO³ provides a comprehensive plan that can address this issue mid to long term.

¹ [CMLTO 2021 Annual Report](#).

² [Research Initiative: Clinical Placements and the Shortage of MLTs](#)

³ [Call to Action: Investing in Lab Health Human Resources](#)

General Medical Laboratory Technologist Scarcity

General Medical Laboratory Technologists account for 68% of total openings (401)

- The other 38% were divided among leadership (34) and MLA/T (154).

26% of all MLT openings are in Rural or Remote areas

- The other 74% were in Large Urban Centres (157), Mid-Sized Urban Centres (141).
- Unfilled MLT positions represent 75% of the total openings in rural areas and 65% of the openings in remote areas.
- Of the 49 remote and rural centre labs that answered the survey, 73% had job postings that had been open for 3 months or more.

Lab Professionals by Location

	Remote	Rural Centre	Mid-Sized Urban	Large Urban	Total
Total Unfilled Lab Positions	20	120	200	249	589
Total Unfilled MLT positions	13	91	141	157	401

Total Lab Employees:

Total Lab Positions	Lab Management	MLTs	MLA/Ts	Total	Percentage of Positions Open	Percentage of MLT Positions Open
Remote	6	39	17	62	32%	33%
Rural	43	365	303	660	18%	25%
Mid-size Urban	109	1222	968	2558	8%	12%
Large Urban	161	2326	1590	3922	6%	6%
Total All	319	3952	2872	7202	8%	10%

- In addition, 33% of Lab Management are 55+ and 23% of MLTs are 55+ in the workplaces surveyed.

Medical Laboratory Positions Remain Empty – Open 3+ Months

89% of workplaces who responded to the survey had at least one opening.

- Of that 89%, **86% said that at least one of their openings has gone unfilled for at least 3 months.**

Lab Turnaround Time:

66% of labs responded that shortages were affecting or were somewhat affecting lab turnaround time.

- 34% said shortages were not affecting their turnaround times; however, 11% listed in the open comment that staff work more hours or use overtime to make their testing times.

Barriers to taking Clinical Placement Students

86% of labs stated they experience barriers to taking clinical placement students for the following reasons:

- 40% are unable to provide training in all 5 disciplines, 36% cited time, 9% cited recruitment
- Of the 86% of respondents who said they have barriers to taking clinical placement students, 33% used the open comment box to say they experience more than one barrier.
- Of the 14% of respondents who said they have no barriers, 62% are in either a mid-size (5) or large urban centre (3).

The following MLT training programs were listed by labs as their primary source for MLTs

- Michener- 35%
- Cambrian College- 33%
- St. Clair- 16%
- Ontario Tech University- 9%
- St. Lawrence- 9%

Other Comments:

- Two comments cited that they have retirements coming up that will put them in a shortage: “We have even more MLTs who are 50+, 2 MLTs are retiring next year”, “MLTs retiring next year will put us in a shortage”
- Several comments citing staff burnout: “Burn out is rampant. No incentives from the government throughout the pandemic = staff feeling undervalued, especially after implementing COVID testing platforms during pandemic to meet the community demands. Both ID Now and BD Max validated and implemented as well as referring to



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big centers like SHL or Sick Kids. So much sacrifice and no retention bonus or pandemic pay even though many that received it didn't ever touch a COVID sample/patient.... How do you increase morale when the health system doesn't even know you exist?"

- "It is getting more difficult to staff. Staff are frustrated and getting burned out. They don't feel supported even though the organization continues to post. Rural hospitals are competing with the city. The work environment in smaller centers requires a strong technologist who can multi-task and is competent in their skills, knowledge and abilities. I fear that the provincial healthcare is on the brink of collapse with ongoing shortages associated with regulated health professionals."
- Several asked for upskilling programs or regulation and expanded scope for MLA/Ts
- Remote and rural areas cited difficulty attracting MLTs