



Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario
L'Association des professionnels des laboratoires médicaux de l'Ontario

MLPAO RESPONSE TO ONTARIO'S COVID-19 FALL PREPAREDNESS PLAN

OCT 2 - HAMILTON ON: As we move into a second wave of COVID-19, the medical laboratory professionals processing samples and analyzing tests remain hidden in Ontario's plan to strengthen the healthcare system.

"Recruiting and retaining our front-line healthcare workers in our continuous fight against COVID-19 is critical," Minister of Health Christine Elliott asserted in [Monday's press release](#). Their [announcement](#), emphasizes a need for reinforcements, outlining a plan to recruit, retain, and support 3700 more healthcare workers.

However, the plan provides no obvious hope of backup for Ontario's Medical Laboratory Technologists (MLTs) and Medical Laboratory Assistant/Technicians (MLA/Ts). Despite their direct contact with COVID-19 patients and working 24/7 for 6 months without respite, medical laboratory professionals were not included in Temporary Pandemic Pay.

Medical laboratory professionals take their role in healthcare deeply personally. They know every sample is a patient waiting to hear results. This commitment is currently causing medical laboratory professionals to sacrifice their own mental and physical health to meet the rolling targets the government is setting.

COVID-19 testing has increased from 10,000/day to [40,000](#) with the intention of ramping up to [50,000 tests/day](#) and a [potential surge capacity of 100,000](#). With [pharmacies taking swabs](#) and [more assessment centres](#), labs will be under further pressure to continue to provide timely and accurate results. Labs are testing for COVID-19 alongside nearly [500,000 tests/day for other medical concerns](#). Tests for flu and attempting to reduce backlogs in surgeries and other procedures will add to this workload.

With 70% of Ontario laboratories entering the pandemic short-staffed,¹ this pace is causing burnout.² Staff are taking early retirement, sick leave, and others leaving the profession.³ [Yesterday's announcement](#) of a \$2-3 wage enhancement for PSWs is understandable given COVID-19's exacerbation of the situation in long-term care facilities across the province.

We ask the government to allocate directed funding to Ontario laboratories and medical laboratory professionals to attract and retain the workforce needed to continue to meet the province's growing COVID-19 testing targets.

We also call for an investment in training programs to ensure reinforcements arrive for medical laboratory professionals. The MLPAO has been advocating for forward-thinking solutions to the shortages of MLTs for the past 2 years. We hope to work with the government to introduce bridging programs and specialized training to ensure support arrives for weary lab teams.

Recruiting and retaining front-line healthcare workers *is* crucial. Although we are often hidden, medical laboratory professionals are front-line. In the fight against COVID-19, medical laboratory professionals are a critical unit. We call on the province for support. We cannot hold out for much longer.

– Michelle Hoad, MLPAO CEO

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¹ Based on a survey of 2212 lab leaders and professionals in May 2020.

² 82% of lab staff are experiencing burnout based on a survey of 737 lab professionals in June 2020.

³ 22% retirement, 29% contracting COVID-19, 35% other factors - survey of 2212 lab leaders and professionals in May 2020.