

MEDIA STATEMENT

MLPAO Announces Multi-Step Plan - Action Now for Ontario Labs

September 1, 2020 – Hamilton ON: “The medical laboratory profession has reached a critical status. The projected shortage of Medical Laboratory Technologists (MLTs) has been accelerated due to a variety of reasons, one being the world-wide COVID-19 pandemic. Laboratories across the province have advised us that there is an immediate and long-term need for qualified MLTs. Initially our rural and remote communities were impacted most, but the shortages are now being felt almost everywhere in the province.

Seven MLT programs were closed in the 1990s under the assumption that instrumentation upgrades in the laboratories of the future would reduce the need for MLTs. While new technology has created more efficient laboratory processes, test results must be analyzed and released. Equipment requires ongoing maintenance and validation. This work can only be done by a Medical Laboratory Technologist. As a result, we have been experiencing a declining MLT workforce for decades now, and it is anticipated that the situation will rapidly worsen as 44% of the profession is expected to retire within the next 5 years.

Over the past 2 years, the MLPAO has been meeting with the provincial government to raise awareness of this issue. COVID-19 pushed the importance of diagnostic testing to the forefront of healthcare. Our medical laboratory professionals have been working 24/7. Although they are experiencing burnout, they are still meeting the provincial targets being set by the government, which is increasingly difficult while understaffed. The COVID-19 pandemic has served to amplify the shortages, accelerating retirements, with some MLTs leaving the profession due to burnout.

Turnaround times for lab testing will suffer from the shortage of MLTs. The efficiency of instrumentation is at the maximum for the human resources. The system cannot be pushed any further—Ontario laboratories are at a breaking point. Technology cannot replace MLTs, especially in a global pandemic.

Today, the MLPAO is announcing our multi-step plan called *Action Now for Ontario Labs*. We are assembling five Ontario Regional Laboratory Teams to address these ongoing shortages. These teams will:

1. Confirm specific regional shortages
2. Engage local MLT programs
3. Develop an ask to the provincial government

The MLT shortage is a long-standing issue in our province. Hopeful but nearsighted policy decisions set it in motion over 20 years ago. The decisions of laboratories and governments today did not cause this problem. However, it falls to us now to find answers. We all need to come together—as employers, educators, and policy-makers—to solve it. With this project, we hope to find answers to the MLT shortage. Not just for ourselves, as stakeholders experiencing this issue now, but also for the future of Ontario laboratories.”

- Michelle Hoad, CEO, Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario.

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