

MEDIA STATEMENT: LAB CAPACITY A CRITICAL CONSIDERATION IN THIRD WAVE

April 22, 2021 – Hamilton ON: “As Ontario enters the peak of a third wave of COVID-19, with ICU numbers and variants of concern on the rise, we urgently need to find answers for overworked laboratory professionals. Although we are well beyond 13.5 million COVID-19 tests, our labs are overworked, understaffed, and stressed.

Medical laboratory professionals have already been struggling meeting 24-hour testing demands. 70% of laboratories entered the pandemic short-staffed¹ and 86% of laboratory professionals experiencing burnout, and 44% are considering stress or sick leave.² Lab professionals are working double shifts and postponing retirements.

Higher ICU numbers and new variants of concern (VOC) in this third wave all lead to a significant rise in lab testing. With COVID-19 patients now representing 806 out of the province's 2,300 ICU beds, this increase means additional tests going into laboratories. More transmissible COVID-19 variants also increase testing demands to confirm transmission as well as monitoring and patient care as more become hospitalized.

We appreciate Premier Ford's acknowledgement today of the hard work healthcare teams are doing, as well as the government's willingness to admit mistakes and move forward. With that in mind, we encourage the province to reconsider the health human resource crisis that has brought Ontario's laboratories to a breaking point.

Lab capacity is a factor combining instrumentation, supplies and reagents, laboratory information systems, and human resources. Although strides have been made on new instrumentation, trained professionals are required to run laboratory equipment and analyze tests.

Our workforce is stretched thin—the current demand for Medical Laboratory Technologists (MLTs) is almost double the supply.³ 43% of practicing MLTs are eligible to retire in the next 4-8 years.⁴ This has been accelerated with the stress of the pandemic as 37% contemplate early retirement or leaving the profession.⁵ We are lacking the required people needed to run the equipment we have, leaving laboratories faltering.

We echo the Ontario Hospital Association, the Ontario Medical Association, and others in support of the stay-at-home order and the advice of the COVID-19 Science Advisory Table. Every Ontarian must ensure we are keeping hard-working healthcare teams in mind in combatting the spread of COVID-19. These measures are critically important in this third wave, not only for the health and safety of the citizens of Ontario but also the health and safety of our medical laboratory professionals.”

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

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

² Based on a survey of medical laboratory professionals December 2020.

³ Based on data submitted by medical laboratory employers and HR departments in Fall 2020.

⁴ [CMLTO Annual Report 2019](#), assuming retirement eligibility at 55.

⁵ Based on a survey of medical laboratory professionals December 2020.