CAPhO Canadian Association of Pharmacy in Oncology

# Closing the Cancer Care Gap in Rural, Remote and Indigenous Communities

**Canadians living in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities continue to face significant inequities in cancer care and outcomes**

**First Nations** peoples are more likely to be diagnosed with **later-stage cancers** and experience **poorer survival rates**



More than **60%** of First Nations communities are **remote** or **fly-in**



Over **30%** are located more than **90km** from physician services



Rural and remote **Canadians** experience higher **cancer mortality rates** and **greater barriers** to accessing care



Approximately **1 in 4** rural patients face a **high travel burden** when accessing healthcare



These barriers contribute to delayed diagnosis, disruptions in treatment, reduced engagement with care, and poorer outcomes.

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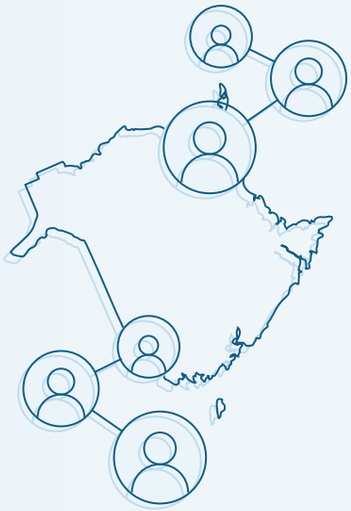
# How to Close the Gap

## Expand Cancer Care Closer to Home

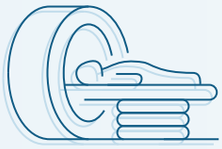


Invest in innovative community-based oncology services, including pharmacist-led, nurse-led, and multidisciplinary outreach programs that bring specialized cancer care directly to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.

Oral anticancer therapies now account for more than 50% of the oncology market in Canada. While these medications require ongoing monitoring and toxicity management, they do not require patients to come on site for administration like parenteral medications.

**Example of a successful innovative model:** New Brunswick implemented a province-wide hematology pharmacist program for patients receiving oral therapies for multiple myeloma. The model was developed to address geographic barriers, workforce shortages, and inconsistent access to specialized expertise outside major centres. A dedicated hematology pharmacist provides in-person and virtual care across the province, including patient education, toxicity management, treatment monitoring, and follow-up. This model has improved access to specialized care closer to home while reducing travel requirements and making more efficient use of limited oncology resources.

## Improve Access to Early Detection and Screening



Fund community-based and mobile cancer screening programs that are co-developed with Indigenous communities and designed to reach underserved populations where they live.

Earlier diagnosis remains one of the most effective ways to improve cancer outcomes. Bringing screening services into communities can reduce barriers to access, decrease late-stage diagnoses, and improve survival rates.

## Support Culturally Safe and Virtually Enabled Cancer Care



Invest in virtual oncology programs and culturally safe models of care that integrate Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, patient navigators, and multidisciplinary healthcare teams.

Support education and training for healthcare professionals to better understand Indigenous health perspectives and incorporate traditional healing practices alongside cancer treatment when desired by patients.

Care models should address the whole person, including physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural, and social well-being, while reducing the need for patients to leave their communities and support networks during treatment.