

The Canadian Medical Laboratory Profession's Call to Action: Backgrounder

Background: Canada is facing a serious health human resource (HHR) shortage of medical laboratory professionals, specifically medical laboratory technologists (MLTs). In 2010 the Canadian Institute for Health Information identified that approximately half of all MLTs would be eligible to retire within 10 years, with the greatest impact felt in Canada's rural and remote communities. This period of time has closed in on the professional community across all provinces and territories, resulting in a dramatic impact on organizations and employees. In addition to staffing shortages, workload measures and workload complexity continues to show an upward trend in the profession. Unfortunately, health system fiscal restraints, workload burden and staffing shortages have decreased the number of clinical placement opportunities for students.

Academic programs are required to procure a clinical placement site and spot for each student prior to entrance in the academic program. With a decrease in available spots, this scenario acts as a bottleneck in the student to workforce pathway and hampers HHR shortage solutions. In order to change this, new models of education and clinical placement training are required.

Required Change: Using recently released Canadian Institute for Health Information data, **approximately 400 additional student seats** are required by medical laboratory technologist programs in Canada to offset retirements. **CSMLS recommends at least 20% of all current and future students to have expectations of obtaining rural or remote positions** after certification, regardless of the province in which they are trained.

Transforming Education Models: CSMLS acknowledges the importance of innovative learning environments and hands-on practice through clinical placement experiences to ensure the next generation's expertise in medical laboratory science. Supporting the need for change to accommodate system bottlenecks, CSMLS released a Position Statement that encourages medical laboratory academic programs to increase simulation-based curricula while decreasing clinical placement hours and maintaining equitable student experience.

During the 2015/2016 academic year, the median clinical placement hours allocated by accredited medical laboratory technologist programs was 1225. There are opportunities, particularly for programs using more than 1225 hours, to consider how simulation and enhanced education models can increase student throughput.

Evidence for Change: In a three-tiered long-term project, information has been sought through formal surveys, an environmental scan, two national forum discussions, targeted information gathering sessions, expert consultation and the Simulation Research Network. Participants include three main stakeholder groups (academics, employers and students) but the pool expands beyond this to other decision makers such as regulators, topic experts and policy representatives. All conclusions support the **CSMLS 2018 initiative to create a national Call to Action (Fall 2018)** which addresses the national and regional, immediate and long-term efforts required to change the health human resource (HHR) shortage of medical laboratory technologists (MLT) within Canada. Proposed solutions include simulation as well as expand beyond this. **CSMLS believes academic programs are central in taking action.**

Relevant Reports:

- [Use of Simulation to Reduce Clinical Placement Hours -Position Statement \(2018\)](#)
- [CSMLS Simulation and Clinical Placement Employer Forum \(2017\)](#)
- [Recent Graduate Clinical Placement Experience Survey \(2016\)](#)
- [CSMLS Simulation and Clinical Placement Educator Forum \(2016\)](#)
- [Current State of Medical Laboratory Science Programs \(2016\)](#)