

Policy Brief

Incentivizing Investment, Driving Impact: Unlocking Canada's Life Sciences Advantage

Ontario Chamber of Commerce

Lead Partner

Roche

Overview

In September 2026, the Canada Investment Summit brought leaders across sectors to mobilize long-term capital projects, create high-quality jobs, and make Canada a top global destination for investment.

One undeniable truth emerged: In an era marked by shifting trade dynamics, building the nation's competitiveness at home is no longer just an economic goal; it is a matter of national sovereignty. Alongside this truth, there is also an undeniable opportunity: Canada has what it takes to lead.

Canada's life sciences sector has all the ingredients needed to invest, build, and grow: more than 220,000 world-class researchers and professionals; a growing ecosystem of 3,800 companies[1] spanning bio and medical technologies, digital health, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing; emerging innovation clusters; a flourishing talent pipeline; and a diverse population that supports cutting-edge research. In Ontario alone, the life sciences sector generates at least $74.6 billion in annual revenue and supports more than 101,000 direct jobs.[2]

However, Canada continues to struggle with persistent cross-sector vulnerabilities, leaving our economic potential unrealized.

In the life sciences sector specifically, slow clinical trial activations, disconnected approval and reimbursement pathways, and siloed health data systems make it harder for patients to benefit from innovation, and for Canada to compete with leading jurisdictions.

This Policy Brief outlines how we can incentivize investment and unlock the full value of Canada's life sciences ecosystem. It focuses on the speed and agility of clinical trials, expanded market access to innovative medicines and therapies, and connected health data systems that support research, care delivery, and system planning.

Canada can create the conditions for investment to ensure its life sciences sector is globally competitive – while delivering livesaving innovations that benefit patients, health systems, and the economy.



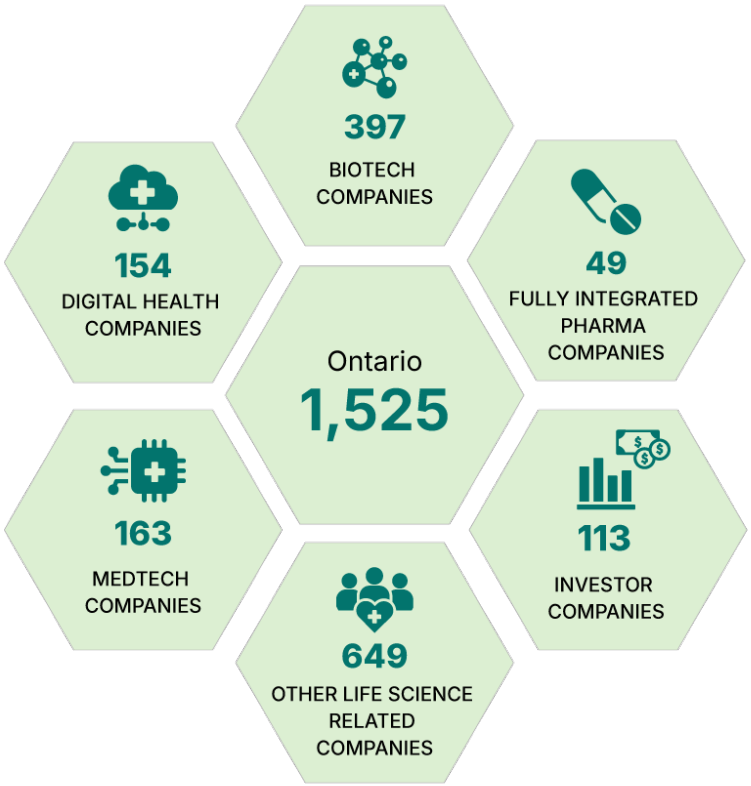
Levelling Up

Accelerating and Streamlining Clinical Trials Across Canada

Canada's life sciences sector is a major driver of innovation and economic growth, contributing almost $35 billion to national GDP.[3] [4] The pharmaceutical industry, with an R&D-to-sales ratio of up to 11 per cent[5], has demonstrated a strong commitment to investing in Canadian research, talent, and infrastructure.



Figure 1: Overview of the Life Sciences Sector by Industry in Ontario*



Source: Overview of life sciences sector in Ontario - Biotechgate

*For definition of categories, please visit https://www.biotechgate.com/about/industry-sectors-covered/

Ontario remains the sector's leading geographic hub, accounting for nearly 40 per cent of all life sciences companies (see Figure 1)[6]. This ecosystem has helped Canada emerge as a globally competitive destination for research and clinical trials.

Canada's research leadership is also delivered through 15 medical schools, 40 academic health care organizations, and more than 15,000 researchers (see Figure 2). This leadership is matched by our strength in clinical trials. Canada captures four per cent of global clinical trials, ranks fourth worldwide in trial sites, and leads the G7 in clinical trial productivity. In 2025 alone, there were over 2,800 active clinical trials in Canada.[7]

Figure 2: Distribution of Clinical Trials in Phase I-IV across Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions



Source: Distribution of clinical trials across Canadian post-secondary ecosystems - GlobalData Pharma Intelligence Center

CATALIS Quebec is a leading example of a successful clinical trial ecosystem. The publicly funded, not-for-profit organization coordinates efforts across government, industry, and research partners to improve clinical research and expand patient access to innovative trials. Its FAST TRACK Evaluation Service, which coordinates and streamlines the review process for industry-sponsored clinical trials across health institutions, has reduced authorization timelines for privately funded clinical trials by more than 65 per cent[8], accelerating the development of and access to new treatments.

Clinical trials improve patient outcomes by expanding access to innovative medicines and guiding clinical decision-making. They also catalyze investment by attracting research funding and supporting high-skilled jobs and training. Combined with Canada's demographically diverse population, these advantages make the country an attractive destination for multinational companies to establish and expand operations.

Atlantic Canada is building on this strong foundation to support continued life sciences innovation. The Atlantic Clinical Trials Network looks to bridge the geographical gap between maritime provinces by leveraging regional collaboration, provincial leadership, and world-class research, to create a single point of entry for partners, patients, and researchers. The network will not only increase patient access to life saving treatments, but better position Atlantic provinces globally as a viable destination for clinical trial sites.



Case Study 1

Australia’s Integrated Clinical Trials Network

Australia has become an attractive destination for medical research and clinical trials, with over 50 world-class medical research institutes, 50 clinical trial networks, and 110,000-person workforce.[9] What makes Australia a leading hub is its rapid approvals system (average six-to-eight-week start-up time), robust regulatory framework, high-quality transferable data, cost efficiency, and an ethnically diverse patient population that enables sponsors to generate clinical evidence that better reflects real-world populations. Certain clinical trial sponsors also benefit from a 43.5 per cent tax rebate on R&D expenses incurred in the country, incentivizing start-ups and multinationals to conduct clinical trials and research in Australia. This model provides an illustrative example for Canada, leveraging the nation’s strengths through targeted reforms that improve regulatory efficiency and strengthen investment incentives.

Although Canada has historically been a competitive destination for biopharmaceutical research investment, its share of global clinical trials has fallen in recent years: from six per cent in 2021 to roughly four per cent in 2026. This represents approximately $2.5 billion in foregone research spending and some 20,000 jobs.[10] In Canada, the average clinical start-up time is 35 weeks[11], significantly longer than leading jurisdictions. The United Kingdom, Australia, Sweden, and the United States have all adopted a unified approval process that simplifies and accelerates clinical trial activations and research projects, bringing new medicines and therapies to patients faster. These trends suggest that competing jurisdictions are advancing more quickly in converting research and discovery into investment opportunities.

To close this gap and capitalize on Canada's life sciences advantage, policymakers must strengthen Canada's innovation-to-care continuum, including the R&D and clinical trials ecosystem. Doing so will incentivize companies to bring more clinical trials to Canada, expand access to cutting-edge care, and support long-term economic growth through a globally competitive research landscape.

Recommended Actions

- **Turn Discovery into Delivery:** Strengthen the full life cycle of R&D and clinical trials through greater investments, expanded commercialization supports and pathways, targeted tax incentives, and scale-up programs. Establish a national target for clinical trial start-up times benchmarked against leading jurisdictions such as Australia, where average start-up times are six to eight weeks.
- **Make Canada Trial-Ready:** Accelerate clinical trial activation through a coordinated National One Stop Shop (NOSS) framework, similar to Australia's Teletrial Program, combining centralized sponsor support, streamlined regulatory pathways, and a decentralized care model, to improve both industry experience and equitable patient access.



Patient Access, Better Outcomes

Improving Canada's Health Innovation Pathways

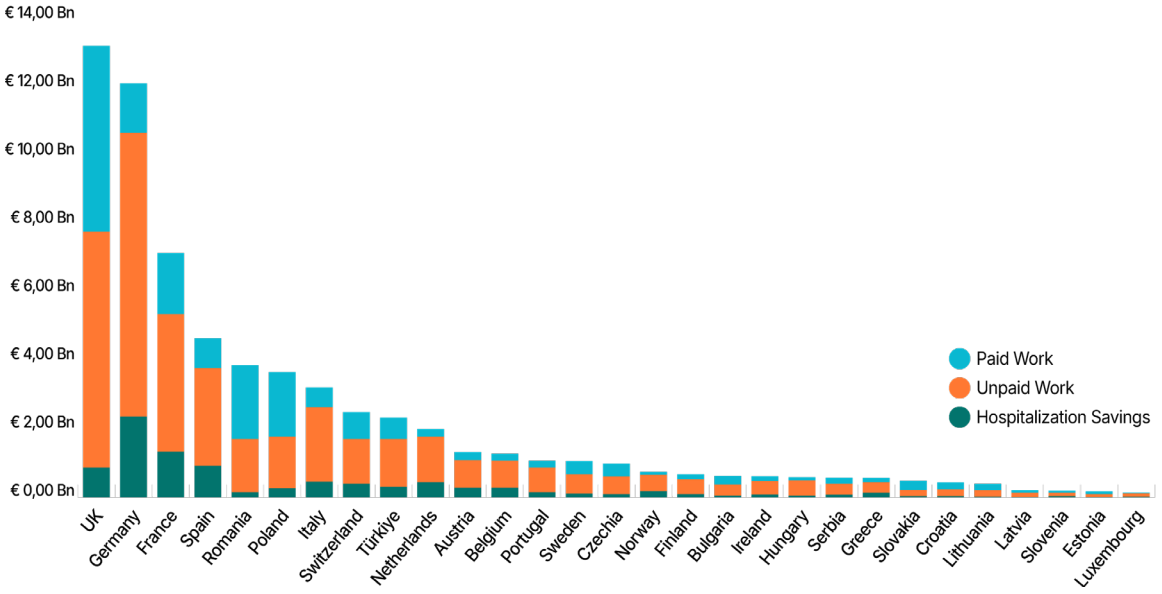
Attracting more clinical trials is only the first step. Canada must also ensure that successful innovative treatments move efficiently from regulatory approval into clinical practice, where they can benefit patients across the country.



Medicines and diagnostics have measurable impact on both patient outcomes and health-system performance. A 2025 study found that, without medicines introduced between 1974 and 1995, premature mortality-related life years lost before age 75 would have been 49 per cent higher in 2022.[12] Timely access can also reduce pressure on health care systems. In Manitoba, early anti-tumour necrosis factor (TNF) treatment for Crohn's disease was associated with fewer IBD-related hospitalizations over five years.[13]

Beyond improving health outcomes, investments in innovative medicines, diagnostics, and technologies can generate significant economic returns and health system savings. Between 1990 and 2024, every $1 million invested in patented medicines in Canada was associated with approximately $3.4 million in public health care savings.[14] European nations have delivered similar returns, with every €1 invested in new medicines generating an estimated €5.67 in societal and economic benefits, alongside €38 billion in workforce productivity gains (see Figure 3).[15]

Figure 3: Monetized Socioeconomic Benefit of Pharmaceutical Innovation across 29 European Countries, by Component and Country

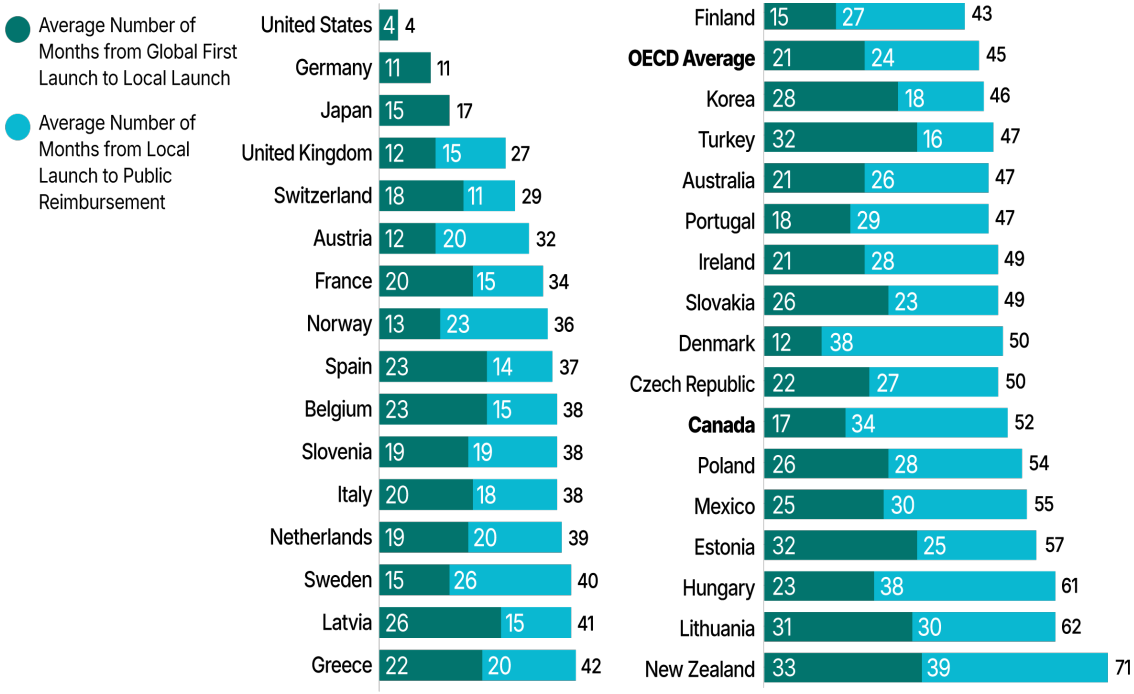


Source: Monetized socioeconomic benefit of pharmaceutical innovation in Europe - efpia

Despite the proven value of accelerated access to innovative medicines and technologies, Canada's path from approval to patient access remains long and fragmented. Prolonged timelines weaken Canada's attractiveness as a market to launch new medicines, diagnostics, clinical trials, and treatments, diverting investment to more competitive jurisdictions. Canadian patients wait about 52 months from a medicine's first global launch to public reimbursement, compared to 45 months across OECD countries (see Figure 4). Of greater concern for Canadian patients: it takes approximately two years following approval for a drug to be made available on a public plan.[16]

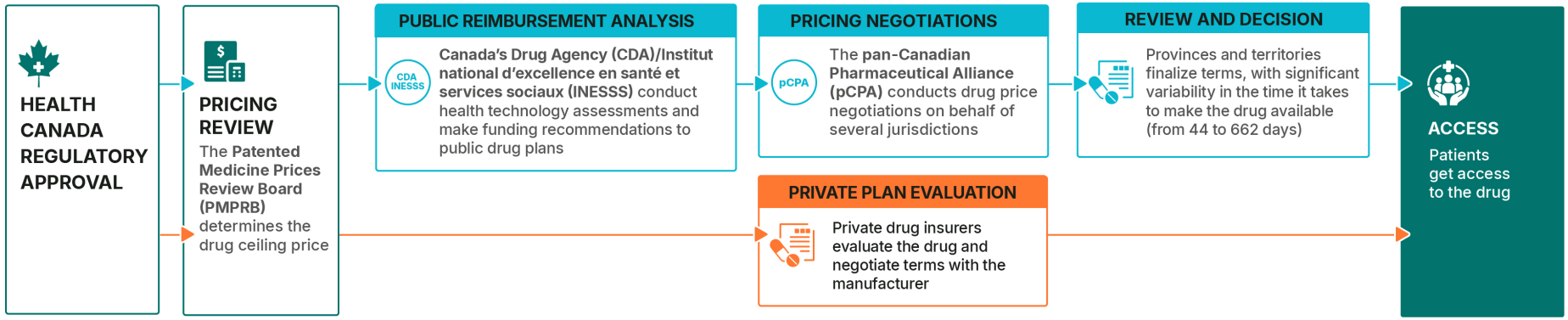
Canada's challenges extend beyond slow reimbursement. A fragmented approval pathway sees regulatory review, health technology assessment, price negotiations, procurement processes, and provincial/territorial listings frequently function as disconnected steps rather than a coordinated system (see Figure 5). This increases uncertainty and delays the Canadian launch of new therapies, harming patients and our global competitiveness.

Figure 4: Number of Months from Global First Launch to Public Reimbursement by OECD Country (2012-2021)



Source: Number of months from global first launch to public reimbursement in OECD - PhRMA

Figure 5: Canadian Drug Access Pathway



Source: Canadian Drug Access Pathway - Innovative Medicines Canada

Canada's Pharmaceutical and Life Sciences Sector Task Force issued a report in 2026, outlining the challenges of the current system. With 39 recommendations, the Task Force urged the federal government to make bold, swift changes to spur a world-leading life sciences sector. Key proposals included aligning Canadian regulatory and reimbursement timelines with international standards, streamlining decision-making, and getting life-saving treatments and care to patients faster.

At the provincial level, Ontario's Funding Accelerated for Specific Treatments (FAST) pilot provides an early example of how innovative, accelerated access pathways can support better patient outcomes and clinical innovation. Since 2025, oncology drugs funded through the FAST program were listed on the provincial public formulary over 60 per cent faster than oncology submissions overall.[17]

Health care should be viewed as an investment rather than an expense, helping to build healthier and more productive communities that contribute to Canada's long-term prosperity. By modernizing regulatory and reimbursement processes, we can improve patient access, attract investment, support innovation, and ensure Canada captures the full health and economic value of its life sciences sector.

Recommended Actions

- **From Approval to Access:** Implement the federal Pharmaceutical and Life Sciences Task Force recommendations to modernize and streamline the regulatory framework to expedite and improve patient access, in tandem with provinces and territories.
- **Tested, Trusted, and Scaled:** Support the scaling of successful pilot programs across provinces and territories, such as Ontario's FAST pilot, by expanding innovative, risk-managed approaches that accelerate access, support the adoption of health innovations, and improve patient outcomes.



From Silos to Seamless Care

Transforming Canada's Health Data Systems

Faster access also depends on trusted, connected data. Without interoperable health information, Canada cannot recruit patients to clinical trials efficiently, generate real-world evidence on the true value of health innovations, evaluate outcomes, or scale innovation across jurisdictions.

Health data systems are not a by-product of health care delivery; they are core infrastructure that connects patients, clinicians, researchers, innovators, and public health systems. A fully optimized, connected health information system could create close to $10 billion in value for Canada per year[18] and generate meaningful economic benefits, including $2.4 billion[19] in health system savings, 5.7 million hours of clinical capacity returned to care, and 51 million hours saved for patients.[20] These benefits underscore why connected, secure, and scalable data must be treated as a national strategic priority and a core pillar of health sovereignty.

Canada has the building blocks for a more connected health data ecosystem with decades of investments, a diverse population that strengthens research and clinical trials, and strong public demand for access to personal health information. New federal action through the *Connected Care for Canadians Act*, a recently announced $100 million investment in VITAL, and provincial investments in building primary care medical record systems (e.g., Ontario's new Primary Care Medical Record System) each serve to improve health services and better connect Canadians to health innovations, through secure data sharing.

Alberta's Connect Care illustrates how integrated health data infrastructure can strengthen care delivery and system resilience. Deployed by Alberta Health Services (AHS), the platform connects more than 125,000 staff, physicians, and other health care providers with patients across more than 1,000 sites and programs in all five of the province's AHS zones.[21] The platform is projected to generate $2 billion in savings over 10 years[22] with increased clinical and patient access to health information and stronger system planning.



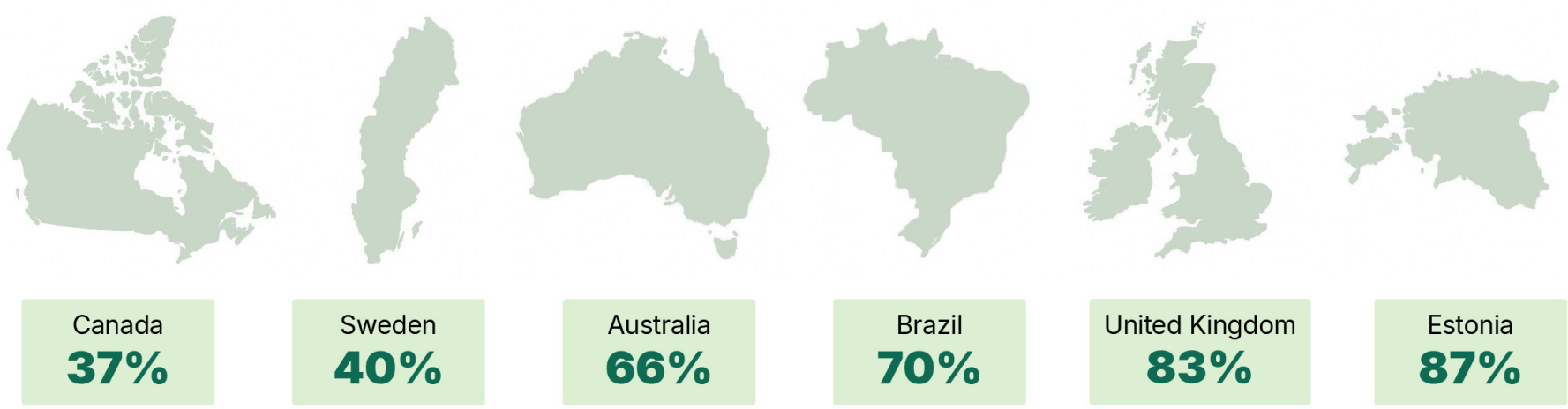
Case Study 2

Finland’s Centralized Model of Care

Finland has taken bold steps in building a digital foundation for health care and social welfare services. By centralizing extensive, high-quality data, Finland built KANTA, a digital services entity that benefits citizens, pharmacies, and social welfare services in the health sector. The Finnish government complemented the system by establishing an enabling regulatory and legal framework through Findata, a one-stop-shop data permit authority, to support responsible use and adoption. Finland’s choice to store 100 per cent of electronic medical records in the system allows for patients, health care professionals, social care services, and pharmacies to easily access information.



Figure 6: How Canada Compares Internationally in Health Data Interoperability Rates



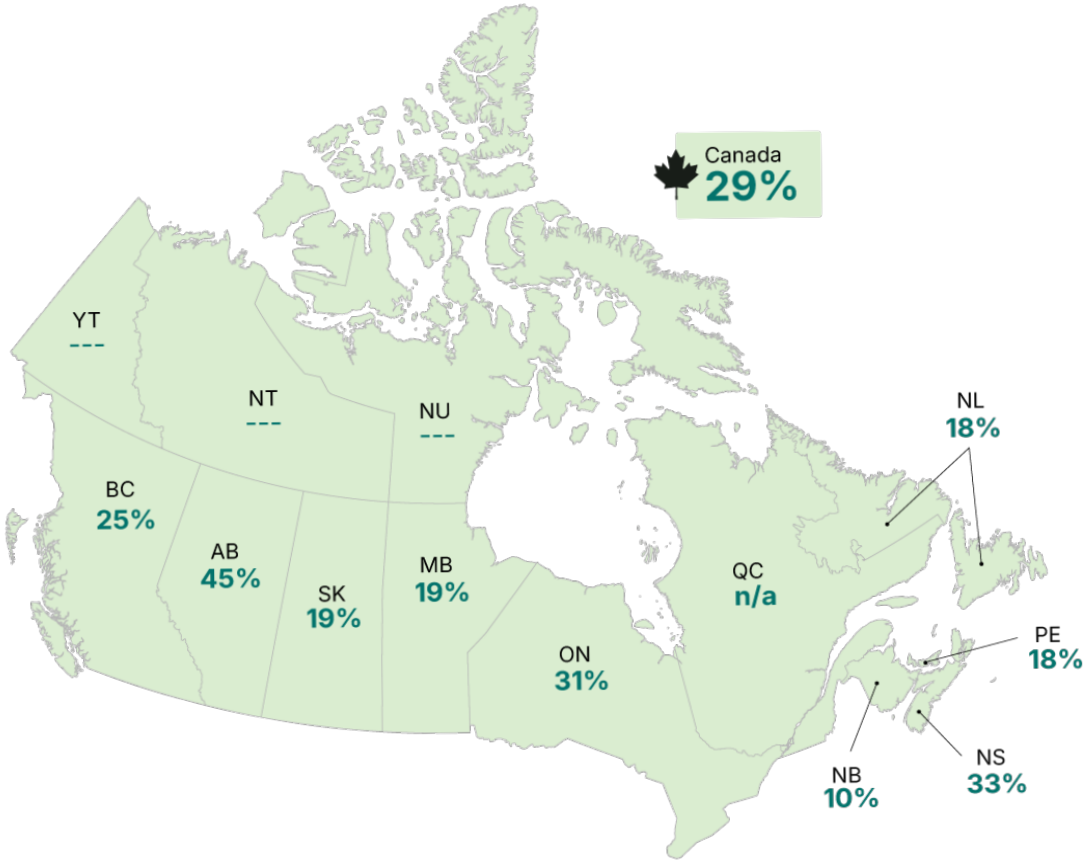
Source: Connected health data - Roche

Global peers are also moving decisively to align health data infrastructure with data sovereignty. The European Union established regulations under the European Health Data Space (EHDS), to create a shared digital health ecosystem across 27 EU member states, setting common legal and technical standards that enable secure exchange, improve interoperability, and support innovation.

Despite progress, Canada's health data ecosystem lags behind that of other countries (see Figure 6). Provinces and territories operate under different legislative frameworks, privacy rules, standards, and institutional practices. This fragmentation creates uncertainty for providers, researchers, innovators, governments, and industry, while limiting Canada's ability to unlock health data for better care coordination and system planning.



Figure 7: Percentage of Physicians who Shared Patient Information Electronically between Care Settings in 2024



Source: Physicians who shared patient information electronically - Canadian Institute for Health Information

These structural barriers are reinforced by trust and adoption challenges. A culture focused on data protection and risk avoidance has led to the creation of silos, while limited public and clinical education has weakened understanding of the value of connected health data for patients and practitioners. Clinicians and health professionals also face uneven access to tools, incentives, and supports, which is why fewer than one in three physicians report sharing patient information electronically with health providers outside their practice (see Figure 7).[23]

Connected health data is more than a health care modernization tool. It is a strategic asset that supports clinical trial recruitment, R&D development, real-world evidence generation, and better decision-making for clinicians, researchers, innovators and system leaders. Unlocking these benefits requires common interoperability standards, clear governance, and public trust in how data is accessed, protected, and used.

Recommended Actions

- **Turn Data Islands into Data Highways:** Implement a pan-Canadian interoperability framework and the Pan-Canadian Health Data Strategy through the *Connected Care for Canadians Act*. In collaboration with industry, academia, and provinces and territories, this should include strong governance structures, workforce literacy and training, and clear accountability, privacy and transparency mechanisms, including addressing the secondary use of health data and patient consent opt-out.
- **Build for the Next Generation of Care:** Recognize health data infrastructure as critical economic infrastructure by integrating it within the federal and provincial/territorial economic, innovation, and life sciences strategies.

Conclusion

As global trade alliances change and international competition for capital intensifies, now is the time for Canada to unlock its life sciences advantage and become a global life sciences engine.

Canada's advantages in the life sciences sector are clear. We have the talent, research excellence, and industrial strengths to compete globally. Success now depends on building an ecosystem in which clinical trials, market access, and health data systems work together to support innovation, investment, and patient care.

By aligning and refining these advantages, Canada can build a globally competitive life sciences ecosystem – translating innovation into both better health outcomes and long-term economic prosperity.



About Our Lead Partner

Roche Canada

At Roche Canada, we combine life-changing diagnostics and medicines to take on the toughest healthcare challenges – those that place the greatest strain on patients, families, communities and health systems.

Guided by the experiences of patients, we are determined to prevent, stop and cure diseases so people can live healthier, longer lives. In 2025, our medicines treated more than 236,000 Canadians and 1 in 4 Canadians were tested using a Roche diagnostic product. We focus on areas like oncology, neurology, cardiovascular and metabolic diseases, ophthalmology, infectious diseases and immunology to provide real and positive change for patients, the people they love, and the professionals who care for them.

Roche's journey in Canada started in 1931 with six people; today, we have almost 2000 employees across the country, with an established global site in Mississauga, Ontario, housing our Canadian pharmaceutical division and multiple global functions. We are proud to help drive Canada's growth: between 2021 and 2025, our activities and investments have stimulated $7.83B in total economic impact, while our broader activities supported an estimated, equivalent of 31,000 full-time jobs, across 27 industries.

Roche Canada looks forward to continuing to work with partners and governments across Canada to identify tangible solutions to strengthen our clinical trials competitiveness, improve timely access to healthcare innovation, and unlock opportunities in connected health data, to build a resilient, prosperous Canada for all.



Endnotes

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