

HEALTH

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‘Huge’ demand for IVF treatment in Ontario — where it’s fully funded — has wait lists stretching to 2018



TOM BLACKWELL | May 20, 2016 | Last Updated: May 31 11:21 AM ET
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THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP Photo/PA, Ben Birchall, File

Ontario’s decision to become the lone province to fully fund in-vitro fertilization has proven wildly popular, with clinics taking just weeks to sign up this year’s limit of 5,000 patients — and setting up an almost instant logjam.

The policy took effect late last December, but fertility specialists say they’re booking would-be parents into as late as 2018.

Clinic caseloads have more than doubled in some instances, as the clientele grows increasingly diverse for a service that normally costs patients up to \$10,000 a shot.

Even the many couples who dropped off wait lists after visiting countries with the Zika virus did little to slow uptake on the controversial, \$50-million program, fertility doctors say.



Handout

“The number of people coming through has been huge,” said Dr. Carl Laskin, a founder of Toronto’s TRIO Fertility clinic. “It is incredibly busy.”

After ballooning costs and evidence of lax standards prompted Quebec to all but abandon its taxpayer-financed IVF plan — Canada’s first — the rest of the country is watching Ontario’s experiment closely.

The province has tried to stave off Quebec’s problems, capping the total number of cases to 5,000 a year, allowing each patient just one IVF treatment and limiting who is eligible.

But at least one physician is concerned about its future amid the flood of infertile, same-sex and other patients taking advantage of the program.

Dr. Tom Hannam said patients wanting taxpayer-covered IVF at his Hannam Fertility Centre in Toronto outnumber his funded spots by 15-1.

He decided to hold lotteries every few months to distribute the government-financed cycles, rather than hand them out on a first-come-first-serve basis as others are doing.

“The intent of the program was to provide access, but with a waiting list that is a year and a half or two years long, it didn’t have the intended effect.

“At its worst, it feels two-tiered,” said Hannam. “The intent of the program was to provide access, but with a waiting list that is a year and a half or two years long, it didn’t have the intended effect.”

One patient signed up for a ministry-covered treatment, however, argues most people like her are grateful the program exists, even if they have to queue.

Sandra Alsadavid, a Toronto lawyer, borrowed money to finance a treatment last year. It was unsuccessful but she said she couldn’t afford to pay for another.

Despite the long waits, government funding “still means you have a chance and some hope,” said Alsadavid, a spokeswoman for the group Conceivable Dreams, which lobbied for coverage.



Richard Drew / AP

Most provinces still do not fully fund the service — where embryos created by combining egg and sperm in a lab are inserted in the patient’s womb — though Quebec and Manitoba offer partial tax credits and New Brunswick a one-time grant.

Public funding is promoted partly as a way to curb the epidemic of multiple births stemming from fertility treatments. Whereas patients paying out of pocket often push for use of two or more embryos at a time —increasing the likelihood of multiples as well as pregnancy — the Ontario program mandates that just a single embryo be “transferred.”

Critics say the lucrative industry should stick to single-embryo treatments regardless, and suggest there are more pressing demands for scarce health-care resources.

Dr. Art Leader, a founding partner of the Ottawa Fertility Centre, said it took about four months for him to fill up the 500 funded treatment spots he was allocated, despite the fact about 20 couples backed off the wait list after travelling to a Zika-endemic country. Authorities recommend such couples wait months before getting pregnant in case they were infected by the virus that has been linked to babies born with abnormally small heads.

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Other clinics reached their cap within weeks, Leader said. He is worried about the mounting backlog, but also believes that pent-up demand at the program’s launch made this year particularly busy.

Laskin said his clinic filled all its funded slots by February and has seen its caseload soar by about two-and-a-half times compared with last year. The wait now stretches into 2017, while he has heard from clinics elsewhere booking people for 2018.

Though his own work week has jumped to 60 hours from 50, he said he’s tried to pace the treatments to avoid overloading his doctors and embryology lab.

Laskin said a small minority of the patients seeking government-funded IVF have fairly slim chances of getting pregnant, but if there is any hope for them, he feels it would be wrong to deny treatment.

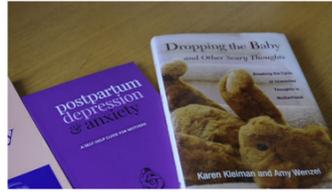
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Bob Kafato · Midland, Ontario

Free in vitro is a disgusting use of public healthcare funds when we have people lined up for cancer treatment. Get your life threatening systems in check and then let's start with the nice to haves, if there are any funds left. This doesn't even make a bit of sense. How about free or subsidized dental care? Wouldn't that trump in vitro spending?

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Brad Spence · Works at Self Employed and Loving It!

If you're a gay premier.....it makes a lot of sense.

Like · Reply ·  13 · May 20, 2016 2:22pm



Sandra Malinder

It's pretty hard to get a job or eat when you have no teeth. So, no we can forget about that. IVF for gay couples is more important. The left really is the enemy of the poor and non public sector working class.

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Lyndia Edwards

Sandra Malinder Liberals are good at creating poor people by taking their money in taxes.

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Pat Manolis

between invitro and sex changes. it's little wonder Ontario is broke...if people want these

procedures, let them pay for it and save the money for those that need life saving care

Like · Reply ·  23 · May 20, 2016 12:08pm



Terralynn Walsh-Verge

You do realize people that get these treatments, have diagnosed medical problems preventing them from having a family. How ignorant is it of you, or anyone else to judge these people. How many of you could afford the 10 000 plus a cycle it takes for medical treatment. It is financially draining, and also very heartbreaking to want a child so much. A lot of these couples also lose children, far into their pregnancy. I know cause I was one. To know that it is possible, yet still not be able to access proper medical treatment is wrong. So we can pay to abort babies, yet not help people in despera... [See More](#)

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Brad Lee

Terralynn Walsh-Verge Except having a child is not a right.

Like · Reply ·  13 · May 20, 2016 1:19pm



Angie Savoie Lange

Brad Lee it's difficult to understand for someone who hasn't been through it, but let me assure you that people who go through IVF do not do it lightly. It's not as easy as walking into a clinic and walking out pregnant. As far as it being publicly funded, I agree it's tricky, but so is sex reassignment surgery and the many other surgeries which are publicly funded but not considered life threatening. There has to be a balance.

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Elke Blinick · Works at Self-Employed

Apart from providing basic health services to Ontarians, OHIP is used as a political tool which includes politically correct procedures such as gender change and abortion, which are not needed by the majority of the population and excludes dental, which everybody needs.

Like · Reply ·  12 · May 20, 2016 4:20pm · Edited



Bradley Mathews · Works at Retired

6 month long waits for surgery just to be able to walk. oh boohoo I can't have a child. Maybe one of the thousands in foster care would help. And that BS of sex change nonsense in jails is just wrong. do your time, get out, get a job and pay for it yourself.

Like · Reply ·  10 · May 20, 2016 1:49pm



Pjlady Bolestridge · Best receptionist ever at CMA Healthcare

did you know that to adopt a child that's in foster care cost the same amount then IVF!! it can range between \$10,000-\$20,000. and about 80% of that cost if lawyers fees.

Like · Reply ·  1 · May 20, 2016 2:20pm



Tommy Lair

Pjlady Bolestridge Having a child is expensive. Can't afford it? Don't have a child. Simple

Like · Reply ·  5 · May 21, 2016 3:38am



Pjlady Bolestridge · Best receptionist ever at CMA Healthcare

Tommy Lair i totally agree. yes having a child is expensive. BUT forking up \$10,000 in one shot in a bit expensive. The worse part about all of this, it's all guys that are complaining. What would you do if you were in a relationship and wanted a family? But knowing that your wife or girlfriend couldn't. If you really want a family this would affect you. knowing that one of the things in the world a women is suppose to be able to do for her spouse is to bare a child and she can't even do that. I have done. think it affects her?? Am aware the guys don't think

can't even do that. How do you think it affects her?? Apparently guys don't think about that! and ppl call us selfish....

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Louise Fribance

How about people who are pregnant but don't want to be, have the babies, then put them up for adoption and, the people who want children, can then adopt them. Wouldn't cost much. I did the adoption part and it's been a blessing ever since. A child doesn't have to be of your own blood to be truly your child.

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Sue Baker

You know, that would be logical, therefore has no place in the liberal mind-set.

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