



Canadian Stroke Network

Réseau canadien contre  
les accidents cérébrovasculaires



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## Stroke units save lives and millions in hospital costs, new study finds

*Coordinated care also reduces rate of disability*

OTTAWA— Canada's health-care system could save up to \$240 million a year in inpatient hospital costs if all stroke patients were treated in organized 'stroke units,' according to a Calgary study published in the current issue of the journal *Stroke*.

The study shows that length of hospital stay is reduced for stroke patients from an average of 19 days on a general hospital ward to 15 days in a stroke unit. A stroke unit is a place in the hospital where stroke patients are cared for by an experienced and specially trained team.

Reduced lengths-of-stay translate into savings of \$240 million a year, based on the current rate of 50,000 clinical strokes in Canada every year.

"This finding is significant because length-of-stay is a major driver of inpatient hospital costs," says Dr. Michael Hill, one of the study's authors and director of the Calgary Stroke Program's Stroke Unit, Alberta Health Services.

The study also confirms earlier research that stroke units reduce the death rate by about five per cent.

Creation of specialized stroke units in hospitals is among recommendations of a national initiative of the Canadian Stroke Network and Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, called the Canadian Stroke Strategy. This initiative aims to reorganize and improve stroke care in all parts of the country.

Canadian Stroke Network Scientific Director Dr. Antoine Hakim says the Calgary findings provide "powerful justification for the development of organized care in every province, not only to save lives and reduce disability but to reduce health-care costs."

"If we implement proven stroke therapies and practices in every province and territory the savings in lives and dollars will be significant," says Sally Brown, CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada.

The Calgary study compared patients managed on a general neurology/medical ward before 2001 with the same number of patients managed on a stroke unit between 2003 and 2005.

“At \$1,200 per hospital bed-day at our hospitals and 1,000 patients per year, five years of stroke unit care has resulted in an estimated \$24 million savings,” the study says. Taking the Calgary data and applying it to the rest of Canada, the savings in a year would be up to \$240 million.

Dr. Hill is funded by the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

The **Canadian Stroke Network** ([www.canadianstrokenetwork.ca](http://www.canadianstrokenetwork.ca)) includes more than 100 of Canada’s leading scientists and clinicians from 24 universities who work collaboratively on various aspects of stroke. The Network, which is headquartered at the University of Ottawa, also includes partners from industry, the non-profit sector, provincial and federal governments. The Canadian Stroke Network, one of Canada’s Networks of Centres of Excellence, is committed to reducing the physical, social and economic impact of stroke on the lives of individual Canadians and on society as a whole.

The **Heart and Stroke Foundation** ([www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca)) is a leading funder of heart and stroke research in Canada. Our mission is to improve the health of Canadians by preventing and reducing disability and death from heart disease and stroke through research, health promotion and advocacy.

The **Calgary Stroke Program** is recognized as one of the leading programs in North America for stroke treatment and research. Within the Calgary Health Region’s (Alberta Health Services) Department of Clinical Neurosciences and the University of Calgary, our Program works alongside a variety of other regional departments to provide quality acute, rehabilitative, and preventative care to people with stroke and their families. Through collaborations with our regional, provincial, national, and international partners, we strive to advance stroke care in Alberta and beyond.

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