

**SOONER  
SAFER  
SMARTER**



**Saskatchewan  
Surgical Initiative**  
*putting the Patient First*

## **Into the Home Stretch**



Working together, health system partners have made big gains in their effort to improve surgical care in Saskatchewan. At the end of three years of the Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative, there are 64 per cent fewer patients waiting more than six months for surgery. That's a reduction from 9,875 patients waiting in April 2010 to just 3,577 on March 31, 2013. **Patients are getting surgery sooner**, with increased safety, thanks to a concerted effort to improve outcomes for patients.

**"We've made incredible progress toward our goal. It's important to make a concerted effort in this final year."**

*Dustin Duncan, Minister of Health*

### ***Our goals: improve patients' surgical experience, shorten wait times for surgery, and improve safety and quality.***

We are getting results:

- Referrals to some specialist groups are being pooled, for quicker first appointments.
- Roadblocks to early assessment and treatment are being overcome using patient "pathways".
- Surgical safety checklists and medication reconciliation are preventing errors.
- Standardized care is reducing surgical site infections.
- Better patient flow and discharge planning are improving access and outcomes.
- Training of more operating room nurses increases health system's surgical capacity.
- Specialists are working toward agreement on best diagnostic and treatment approaches for specific medical conditions.
- Health system partners are using Lean methodology to create a culture of continuous improvement.

Following through on its promise to support innovation, the government is investing \$70.5 million in the Surgical Initiative in 2013-14, up \$10 million from 2012-13. The increase will enable additional surgeries and related home care and therapy services, while continuing to support quality and safety improvements.

# Sooner

Saskatchewan's health system is making excellent progress under the Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative toward **our ultimate goal of offering patients safer surgery within three months by April 2014**. We recognize this is an aggressive target, but are committed to achieving and maintaining this reduction in wait times.

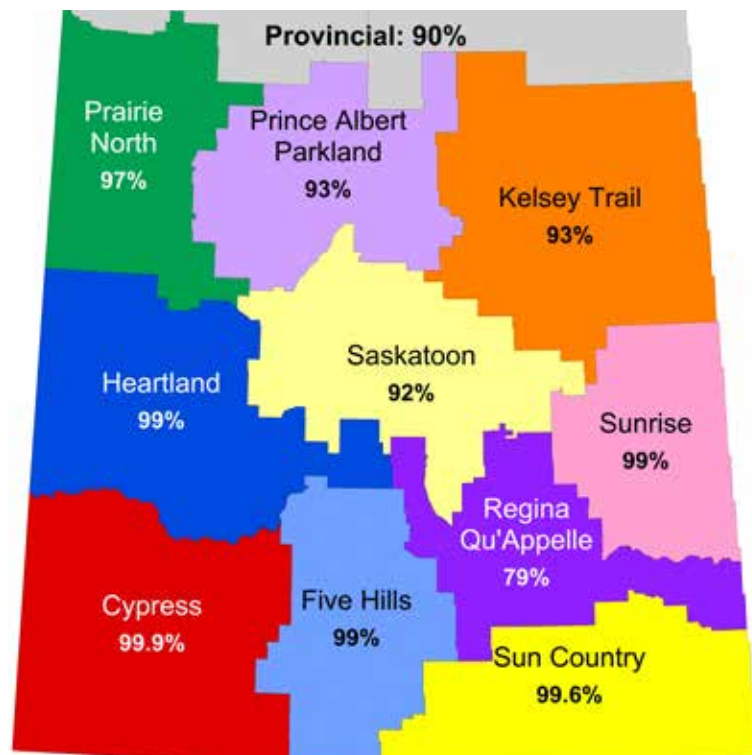
The Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative's three-year target for March 31, 2013 was to ensure that **every surgical patient is offered a surgical date within six months**.

On March 31, there were five health regions with no patients waiting more than six months for surgery, and three health regions that among them have 22 patients waiting. Regina Qu'Appelle and Saskatoon Health Regions handle the bulk of the province's surgeries and account for most of the long-waiting patients.

Saskatoon has whittled its list down to 694 patients waiting longer than six months, achieving 92 per cent of its March 31, 2013 target. Regina Qu'Appelle still has 2,861 patients who have waited that long, achieving 79 per cent of its target. Regina Qu'Appelle made a concerted effort over the past year to overcome a shortage of operating room nurses and to expand capacity using third-party surgery providers. Regina Qu'Appelle has acknowledged it will meet the 2014 target of providing all surgeries within three months but will require an extended time line.

Since 2007, the number of patients waiting more than six months for surgery has fallen 66 per cent (from 10,635 to 3,577). Since the Surgical Initiative was launched in April 2010, that number has fallen 64 per cent -- with 6,298 fewer patients now waiting more than six months for surgery.

## Surgeries Performed Within 6 Months



Percentages are based on surgeries performed in each health region during the period October 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013. Surgical services are not offered in the three northern health regions.

There are still some patients who have been waiting longer than 12 months for surgery. Most of the long-waiting patients can be traced to a few specialties, such as orthopedic surgeries in Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region and ear, nose and throat surgeries and plastic surgeries in Saskatoon.

There were a total of 19,263 patients waiting for surgery on March 31, 2013. This is a decrease of 30 per cent (or 8,317 fewer people waiting) since the launch of the Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative in April 2010.

Saskatchewan Surgical Patients	November 2007	March 31, 2010 (Start of SkSI)	March 31, 2013 (End of Year 3)	% Change Nov 07 - Mar 13	% Change Apr 10 - Mar 13
All patients waiting over 12 months	5,125	3,999	<b>923</b>	↓ 82%	↓ 77%
All patients waiting over 6 months	10,635	9,875	<b>3,577</b>	↓ 66%	↓ 64%
All patients waiting more than 3 months	15,357	15,341	<b>7,325</b>	↓ 52%	↓ 52%
Total Patients Waiting	26,739	27,580	<b>19,263</b>	↓ 28%	↓ 30%

## Innovative Methods

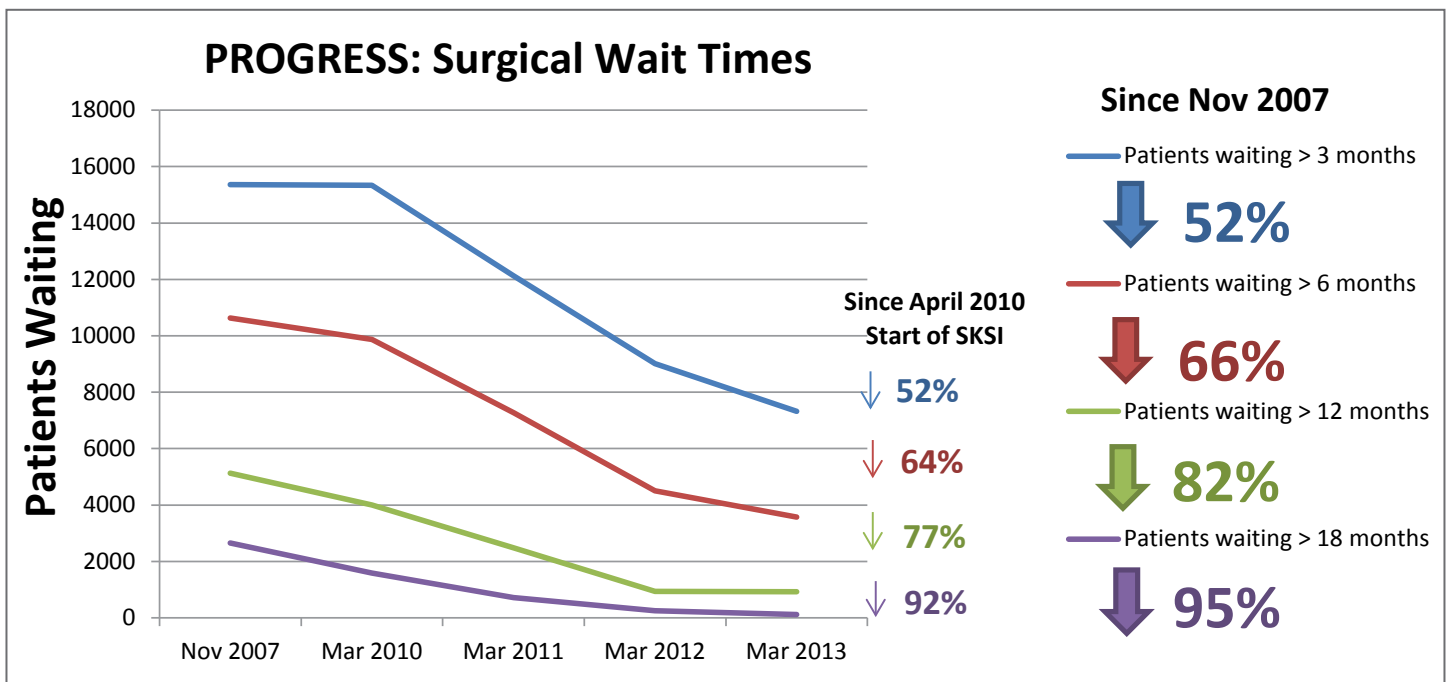
One factor contributing to the gains made this past year is the increased number of **surgical groups that pool new patient referrals**. This approach lets patients choose to be seen either by a particular specialist or by the next available, qualified specialist in the pool. Groups of specialists in various cities that pool referrals now include: orthopedic surgeons, neurosurgeons, general surgeons, urologists, cardiac and vascular surgeons, obstetricians and gynecologists.

Another factor contributing to the year's achievements is the Perioperative Nursing Program offered by SIAST. With core funding from the Ministry of Advanced Education, the program normally trains 18 students per year. To meet increasing demand since 2010, the Ministry of Health has funded training for an additional 46 nurses, with funding for 28 more in 2013-14. Health regions have also augmented training capacity by providing additional funding to train 31 perioperative nurses.



*Pooled Referrals: Wait List Information Clerk **Alisha Van de Sype** (foreground) demonstrates HealthLine's new Referral Management Service for HealthLine Director **Roberta Wiest** (left) and **Dr. Corrine Jabs**, Department Head of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region.*

**"The total increased demand has resulted in between 50 and 55 nurses obtaining SIAST Perioperative Nursing education in each of the last three years. We're seeing fewer cancellations due to shortages of OR staff."** *Eli Ahlquist, RN MPA, Perioperative Nursing Program Head*



# Safer

The Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative supports a variety of projects that promote patient safety, including programs to prevent medication errors and reduce surgical site infections.

**The Surgical Safety Checklist** is an internationally recognized tool to prevent errors and improve patient safety by promoting better communication and teamwork in the Operating Room (OR). All 10 health regions that perform surgery have made remarkable progress in adopting the Surgical Safety Checklist in their ORs. From September 2011 to March 2013, participation increased from 71 per cent to 96 per cent.

By using the checklist, good catches such as medication not given, or allergies not identified, have prevented possible harm to patients.

Surgical teams continue to adapt the checklist to specific surgical procedures. Questions asked by the

team before, during and after surgery cover important tasks of performing surgery, such as patient name, what procedure, where on body and status of equipment and supplies.

According to the Canadian Patient Safety Institute (CPSI), **surgical site infections (SSIs)** are a frequent type of preventable adverse event accounting for 21 per cent of healthcare-associated infections. Each Saskatchewan health region that performs surgery has a surveillance program to monitor rates and inform healthcare providers when a surgical site infection occurs.

Health regions are implementing surgical site infection prevention processes proven to reduce the likelihood of infections related to surgery. The prevention bundle is validated by the CPSI's health provider program **Safer Healthcare Now!**

**“It’s often the little things that get overlooked. These seemingly minor missed steps can have serious consequences for our patients. The checklist is a tool to help prevent that.”**

*Dr. Peter Barrett, Surgical Initiative physician leader*



To increase surgical capacity, the health system has funded more training for operating room nurses like **Patrick Bernardo**. (Photo courtesy of SIAST)

# Smarter



**The Variation and Appropriateness - Vascular Clinic Working Group Meeting:**  
 From left to right: (Back row)  
**Tanya Verrall**, Health Quality Council (HQC);  
**David Kopriva**, Vascular Surgeon, RQHR;  
**Peter Barrett**, Physician Leader, Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative;  
**Don McCarville**, Vascular Surgeon, RQHR;  
**Steven Lewis**, Consultant, Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative;  
**Shanti Lala**, Interventional Radiologist, RQHR;  
**Gary Groot**, General Surgeon, SHR;  
**Bruce Berscheid**, Interventional Radiologist, SHR;  
 (front row)  
**Brian Ulmer**, Vascular Surgeon, SHR;  
**Gary Teare**, HQC;  
**Laura Schwartz**, HQC;  
**Jessica Hamilton**, HQC.

**“At this point we have a very solid start. The improvements that come out of this will benefit patients forever.”** Working group member Dr. David Kopriva, Vascular Surgeon, Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region

One of the goals of the Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative is to ensure the most appropriate care is provided to patients across the province. Records show there is considerable variation in the rates of some procedures depending on where the patient lives and seeks care. Unexplained variation can point to quality issues, so a group of surgeons, researchers, Health Ministry representatives and measurement specialists from the Health Quality Council is examining this issue. The goal of the **Variation and Appropriateness Working Group** is to support Saskatchewan surgeons in developing the best practice protocols for different health problems.

Expanding on the **Releasing Time to Care™** program implemented in hospitals across the province starting in 2008, Saskatchewan has adopted Lean continuous improvement methodology as the foundation to help us achieve improvements in quality, patient and staff safety, access to health services, and value for patients. Health care providers, physicians, leaders and staff have participated in training sessions and projects as continuous improvement becomes the norm for Saskatchewan's health system. Many rapid process improvement workshops to make targeted improvements in surgical care have been completed.

**Patient pathways** are recognized as another innovative way to streamline care for patients as they move through the system, ensuring they quickly receive the most appropriate treatment. Pathways have been shown to reduce time for assessment, improve patient outcomes, shorten hospital stays, and provide more consistent clinical practice.

Saskatchewan health regions are successfully applying pathway processes in several areas of health care:

Existing	New	In Development
Hip & Knee	Prostate Assessment	Acute Stroke Care
Spine	Pelvic Floor Conditions	Lower-Extremity Wound Care
Bariatric Surgery		

# 2013-14 Budget Highlights

Surgical Initiative funding in the 2013-14 budget is **\$70.5 million**:

- More than \$60 million for **hospital costs** related to higher surgery volumes (7,000 more surgeries than in 2012-13, an increase of 8.4 per cent).
- Almost \$7.8 million for **home care** and **post-operative rehab support**.
- Approximately \$1.2 million for improved assessment clinics and **patient pathways**.
- \$4 million for **quality and safety improvements** (e.g. expanded pooled referrals; reduced clinical variation; new quality improvement positions).

## 2013-14 Targets

- All patients can receive elective surgery within three months.
- Patients can receive surgery for aggressive cancers within three weeks.
- Wait times reduced for patients to see specialists (wait time for referral to diagnostics or a specialist cut in half by April 2017).
- Gains accomplished by the Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative are sustainable after 2014.

While everyone in Saskatchewan's health system should be congratulated for working together to put the patient first, coordinated efforts to meet the larger goal of providing surgery sooner, safer and smarter continue.

There is still work to do as all partners in the Saskatchewan Surgical Initiative enter this final year. Now is the time to rededicate ourselves toward the successful completion of this initiative so that we can sustain and build on what we've achieved beyond 2014.

For more information, call (306) 787-9901 or visit: [www.sasksurgery.ca](http://www.sasksurgery.ca)

**SOONER  
SAFER  
SMARTER**



**Saskatchewan  
Surgical Initiative**  
*putting the Patient First*