



10 health stories
that mattered
in 2014

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- **EBOLA:** West Africa experienced the largest Ebola outbreak in history and [Canada is playing a prominent role](#) in the fight against the deadly virus. Canadian researchers contributed to the creation of an Ebola vaccine ([VSV-EBOV](#)) and two therapies ([TKM-Ebola](#) and [ZMapp](#)). [Médecins Sans Frontières Canada](#) became a strong advocate for improving the international effort to combat the epidemic and provide medical care to people infected with the virus.
- **END-OF-LIFE:** Quebec became the first province in Canada to [legalize physician-assisted death](#). On June 5, the province's government voted 94–22 in favour of passing Bill 52, an "[Act respecting end-of-life care](#)." The controversial bill, which [underwent 57 amendments](#) leading up to the vote, permits doctors to administer drugs to hasten death for terminally ill patients.
- **MEDICAL MARIJUANA:** Health Canada changed its medical marijuana regulations on April 1, allowing only licensed commercial growers to produce the drug. Due to lack of clinical evidence of safety and efficacy, a cautious approach to prescribing the drug has been recommended by the [Canadian Medical Association](#), [The College of Family Physicians of Canada](#) and [provincial physician colleges](#). Some doctors are worried that becoming "[gatekeepers](#)" to

[medical marijuana](#) will strain their relationships with patients.

- **E-CIGARETTES:** Concerns that e-cigarettes may actually encourage tobacco use rather than supplant it prompted [provincial and territorial health ministers](#) to call for tougher controls on the increasing popular products. Bans on e-cigarette use (or “vaping”) in public spaces and sales to minors were proposed in several cities, including [Toronto](#) and [Vancouver](#). The devices have become so common that Oxford Dictionaries chose [“vape” as the word of the year for 2014](#).
- **MEASLES:** [Outbreaks of measles in several provinces](#) in March and April prompted calls for improved vaccination coverage. British Columbia reported 300 cases and 450 students at a Christian school were quarantined. Herd immunity requires vaccination rates of 95%, but in some areas of BC the rate is only 88%. [Canada ranks 28th of 29 of the richest countries](#) with respect to childhood vaccinations rates.
- **SOLDIERS’ HEALTH:** More Canadian soldiers died from suicide than in combat (160:138) during the war in Afghanistan, prompting the Department of National Defence to [hire 54 mental health professionals](#). The federal government will also spend [\\$400 million over six years](#) to expand mental health initiatives. A new [Statistics Canada survey indicated](#) that 16.5% of Canadian soldiers had experienced mental health issues in 2013.
- **HEALTH ACCORD:** The [expiry of the 10-year-old, \\$41-billion health accord](#) between the federal government and provinces and territories on Mar. 31 prompted concerns about the erosion of national, universal health care. The federal government refused to broker a new deal; instead transfers will rise by at least 3% annually, with no conditions on how that money is spent. Physician leaders said the change [could increase health inequality](#).
- **REFUGEE HEALTH:** Federal cuts to refugee health care were ruled [unconstitutional and “cruel and unusual treatment”](#) by a Federal Court justice in July. The federal government [restored access to basic health care](#) in November, but is appealing the court’s decision. Full access to Canadian [health care will be limited](#) until the case is resolved.

- **RESEARCH GRANTS:** Researchers were [outraged at news in December that half of all grant monies](#) from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research will [be contingent on researchers obtaining matching funds externally](#). Contrary to advice from two expert panels, CIHR is also [cutting its institute advisory boards](#) from 13 to 4. The final reports of the expert panels also came under fire for not evaluating the [effect of recommended changes on the Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health](#).
- **ABORTION AVAILABILITY:** When the private Morgentaler clinic in New Brunswick closed on July 31, the NB [Medical Society objected](#) to the protocol that restricted abortion access at hospitals. In November, the province [struck down the abortion restrictions](#). [Access to abortion services is uneven](#) across Canada according to a new survey, but no more so than Prince Edward Island, which has no services.

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- vice from its consultants.
http://www.cmaj.ca/site/earlyreleases/10dec14_CIHR-reforms-contradict-consultant-reports.xhtml
- The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada predicts the federal government will [cut \\$2.6 billion and 5064 jobs](#) from ten science-based federal departments between 2013 and 2016. In a report, the union representing scientists and professional public employees catalogued cuts already made to science programs and budgets, as well as top scientists axed from the federal payroll.
- Jan 24: Health Canada [research library changes](#) have left scientists scrambling to access research, according to a report obtained by CBC News. The scientists say information has become increasingly difficult to access since the main library closed and retrieval was outsourced to a private company.
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Quebec's two bills...

<http://www.cmaj.ca/content/early/2014/12/08/cmaj.109-4954.full.pdf+html?sid=27dd0490-18b6-43f2-b104-3109f724fcd8>

Quebec Health Minister Dr. Gaétan Barrette is planning nothing less than remodeling the province's health care system by shedding a tier of administration, and forcing doctors to work at least 12 hours a week in public facilities and have a caseload of at least 1000 patients or risk losing up to 30 percent of their pay.

- May 30: [Quebec must limit growth in health spending](#), among other reforms, to achieve a sustainable balanced budget, states a report by the Institut du Québec ([full version in French only](#)). Lowering the annual increase in health care spending from 5.2% to 4.2% would improve "budget prospects substantially," states the institute.