

# Minority women least likely to gain access to a doctor, study says

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One in three South Asian, West Asian or Arab women — one of the fastest growing segments of Canada's population — say they have trouble accessing a doctor to address an urgent health concern or to monitor health problems. The findings, from a new study by researchers at St. Michael's Hospital and the Institute for Clinical and Evaluative Sciences (ICES), finds this group and immigrant women and men are at a significant disadvantage compared to Canadian-born individuals when it comes to finding a doctor, getting an appointment and accessing specialists for their health-care needs.

"Ensuring all Ontarians have equal access to care is important if we want to improve the health and well-being of men and women across the province," says Arlene Bierman, a physician at St. Michael's Hospital and principal investigator of the study, entitled Project for an Ontario Women's Health Evidence-Based Report (POWER). "Statistics Canada estimates by 2031, the country's visible [minority population](#) will double, with South Asians forming the largest visible minority group. We need to be able to better serve the growing [health-care](#) needs of this community and reduce barriers to care to improve health outcomes," added Dr. Bierman, also an ICES investigator.

The POWER (the Project for an Ontario Women's Health Evidence-Based Report) study — a joint study from St. Michael's Hospital and the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) — is the first in the province to provide a comprehensive overview of women's health in relation to gender, income, education, ethnicity and geography. The

findings are detailed in the report titled Access to Care-the seventh chapter to be released as part of the study. Findings can be used by policymakers and health-care providers to improve access, quality and outcomes of care for Ontario women. The POWER Study was funded by Echo: Improving Women's Health in Ontario, an agency of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

"The findings of the POWER Study's Access to Care chapter are certainly timely given what we now know about Canada's future demography. It's clear that changes in service delivery and community collaborations are needed to make health care more accessible for Ontario's immigrant population. This baseline study will allow us to track efforts to improve access," says Pat Campbell, CEO, Echo.

Key findings of the POWER Access to Care chapter released today include:

- More than 50 per cent of South Asian, West Asian or Arab adults were not very satisfied with their ability to get an appointment with a doctor for a regular check up.
- Nearly 40 per cent of East and Southeast Asian and 34 per cent of Aboriginal adults reported having difficulties when accessing a specialist compared with 22 per cent of White Ontarians.
- 15 per cent of immigrants who had been in Canada for less than five years do not have a primary care doctor, that's more than double the percentage (7.3 per cent) of Canadian-born men and women who reported not having a primary care doctor.
- Thirty per cent of women who did not often speak English or French at home reported more difficulties accessing care from a

family doctor to monitor health problems compared to less than 20 per cent of women who spoke English or French.

- More than 30 per cent of immigrant women who had been in Canada for less than 10 years reported having difficulties getting an appointment with a family doctor for an urgent, non-emergent health problem compared to 18 per cent of those who were Canadian-born.
- Access to dental care across the province was problematic. More than 50 per cent of South Asian and West Asian or Arab women reported not seeing a dentist in the previous 12 months compared to one-quarter of White women.

Provided by St. Michael's Hospital

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