

Provincial effort to improve stroke care in Alberta is 'paying off'

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Stroke care has improved considerably in Alberta following the implementation of the Alberta Provincial Stroke Strategy (APSS), leading to more targeted patient care and fewer health complications, according to a study presented today at the Canadian Stroke Congress.

Nearly 97 per cent of stroke patients received a brain-imaging scan during their admission to hospital in 2011, compared to 88 per cent before the APSS was implemented in 2006.

"The faster a patient has access to brain imaging, the faster they get the right diagnosis and the right treatment," says lead author Dr. Thomas Jeerakathil of the University of Alberta. "We are enhancing care for stroke through the Provincial Stroke Strategy and it's paying off throughout the province."

Researchers analyzed more than 4,500 [patient records](#) and found an increase of 18 per cent in the number of patients receiving swallowing screens after stroke—from 38.2 per cent before the APSS to 56.6 per cent at the peak of the APSS's success. Conducting swallowing screens reduces the risk of aspiration [pneumonia](#), a complication caused when a patient who is unable to swallow properly absorbs [food particles](#) into their lungs.

In addition, the number of patients receiving care in a designated stroke unit rose to 53.6 per cent from 26.9 per cent over the course of the project, an increase of 27 per cent. Stroke unit care reduces the

likelihood of death and disability by as much as 30 per cent for people with mild, moderate or severe stroke.

The APSS directed its efforts toward raising care standards and spreading awareness of quality benchmarks based on guidelines including the Canadian Best Practice Recommendations for Stroke Care, Dr. Jeerakathil says. Primary Stroke Centres were also established throughout Alberta to provide health-care professionals with more education and experience managing [stroke patients](#).

"Alberta's high quality of [stroke care](#) provides an excellent example to all Canadian [health care professionals](#)," says [neurologist](#) Dr. Michael Hill, Co-Chair of the Canadian Stroke Congress. "The success of this reorganized care campaign shows what is possible when dedicated physicians work together to improve care."

"Alberta's integrated stroke system is making a real difference," says Ian Joiner, director of stroke for the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

"Provincial stroke strategies, whether in Alberta or elsewhere in Canada, continue to provide the foundation for positive and lasting outcomes for Canadians."

The Alberta Provincial Stroke Strategy (APSS) is a project funded by the Alberta Provincial Government to improve stroke prevention and care in the province. Alberta Health and Wellness, provincial health zones and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT and Nunavut are working together to ensure all Albertans have access to the right services. Together these partners form the Alberta Stroke Council.

The Canadian Stroke Congress is co-hosted by the Canadian Stroke Network, the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Canadian Stroke Consortium.

Provided by Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

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