

Investing in Laboratory Health Human Resources

The Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario (MLPAO) is a non-profit health professional organization founded in 1963 with members across the province, advocating on behalf of Medical Laboratory Technologists (MLTs) and Medical Laboratory Assistant/Technicians (MLA/Ts). **Combined, these professionals process and interpret 280+ million lab tests annually and are the fourth largest healthcare profession after doctors, nurses, and pharmacists.**

Lab professionals test for thousands of diseases and disorders including early cancer diagnosis, diabetes, heart disease, genetic markers and more.¹ These tests are required to provide diagnostics and comprehensive care to Ontarians for publicly funded cancer screenings, such as mammograms, surgeries and procedures. **70% of all medical decisions rely on lab results** and there is a significant testing demand due to an aging population, expansion of preventive medicine, and new pathogens. Additional medical laboratory professionals are also needed to support the Ontario government's significant expansion to the number of community surgical and diagnostic centres across the province and the Primary Care Action Plan's goal of connecting every person in Ontario to primary care by 2029.

The MLPAO is thankful for the record investments the Ontario government has made over the last five years for the medical laboratory workforce including funding for the development of a PCR course, MLT Bridging Program, the inclusion of two MLT programs in the Learn and Stay Grant, and the 2024 Ontario Budget commitment to add 700 additional seats for MLT, MRT, and MRI/Ts.

The province continues to experience a **shortage of MLTs (350+) with 37%² of MLTs approaching retirement** in the next few years. In August 2025, the MLPAO conducted a survey (*see following pages*) asking Ontario lab leaders to provide updates on their staffing shortages over the past year. The results show:

- **68% of Ontario labs continue to experience MLT shortages.**
- **40% state their shortages are adversely affecting testing turnaround times.**
- **44% indicate MLT shortages have stayed the same or worsened** since last year.
- **37% of labs that currently do not take students** indicated that they **would be able to take students for clinical placements if funding for a trainer (preceptor) was provided.**

The Colorectal Cancer Resource & Action Network's July 2025 report, [Prioritizing the Timely Detection and Diagnosis of Early-Age Onset Cancer to Enable Optimal Disease Management and Outcomes](#), indicates the 14-day turnaround time standard for surgical pathology results (established by Cancer Care Ontario) are **not consistently met by the majority of labs** due to ongoing staffing shortages.³

The report indicates additional funding is required to increase MLT clinical placements to provide students with crucial practical experience in accredited labs. Funding for clinical placements will allow students to develop the skills and knowledge required to successfully enter the workforce and will result in shortened turnaround times for testing results.

¹ <https://www.mlpao.org/wetestforthat-public>

² <https://www.cmlto.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2024-HHR-Report-English-Final-1.pdf>

³ <https://www.mdpi.com/1718-7729/32/7/396>

Health Human Resource Shortage Continues in Labs: MLPAO August 2025 Survey Results

Overview:

- **68% of Ontario labs continue to experience MLT shortages.**
 - 73% of urban labs that responded have MLT shortages.
 - 64% of rural labs that responded have MLT shortages.
- **40% state their staffing shortages are adversely affecting testing turnaround times.**
- **44% indicate MLT staffing shortages have stayed the same or worsened since last year.**
- **42% of labs experiencing a shortage of MLTs are in rural labs.**
- **37% of labs that currently do not take students indicated that they would be able to take students if a trainer was provided.**

Immediate action is required:

- Although there has been a small decrease in the number of labs experiencing MLT shortages since 2024¹, most labs continue to struggle with staffing challenges.
- 37% of MLTs are eligible to retire within the next few years¹. The number of MLTs who left the profession in 2024 increased compared to 2023¹; 69% were eligible for retirement.
- The 2024 and 2025 funding announcements by the Ontario government to add seats to MLT programs and to continue the Learn and Stay Grant will help with the HHR shortage.

As seats in MLT programs increase, clinical placements will continue to be the major bottleneck to getting MLTs into the workforce. Funding for clinical placements is urgently needed to ensure clinical partners sites are able to provide hands-on training opportunities for MLT students.

Survey Response

157/226 Ontario labs responded to the survey (69%) – 56% urban, 42% rural and 2% remote, public hospitals (88%), community laboratories (6%), public health laboratories (3%), and specimen collection centres (1%).

The following definitions were used to define the location:

- **RURAL:** community with a population less than 30,000 AND is more than 30 minutes away in travel time from a community with a population > 30,000.
- **REMOTE:** community without year-round road access or which rely on a third party for transportation to a larger centre.
- **URBAN:** community that is neither rural nor remote.

MLT Shortages

68% of respondents indicated that they are experiencing MLT shortages. Labs rated the status of their MLT staffing shortages compared to last year, with 43% indicating the shortage has stayed the same or worsened and 47% indicated staffing levels have improved.

Number of MLT Vacancies

- 41% of respondents indicated they are short at least 2 MLTs in their workplace. This is difficult for those labs that staff 3-5 MLTs.
- 10 labs reported that up to 30% of their workforce is vacant.
- 59% of labs anticipate they will have the same or more vacancies in the next two years.

Top 3 reasons that **MLT staffing situations have improved** since last year (respondents could select multiple answers)

- 36% - MLT students have accepted positions in our labs.
- 35% - have hired more MLTs.
- 16% - increased use of MLA/Ts to the full scope of their practice.

MLT Clinical Placements

36% of labs in rural locations currently do not take MLT students for placement.

The top **3 barriers to taking MLT students** for clinical placement are (respondents were able to select multiple answers):

- **58% - time (team too busy/understaffed to train).**
- **56% - unable to provide training in all 5 disciplines.**
- **30% - A lack of funding to provide clinical placements.**

MLA/T Shortages

10% of respondents indicate they are experiencing a shortage of Medical Laboratory Assistant/Technicians (MLA/T). **Where there are MLA/T shortages, 44% are in rural labs.**