



**Heart Valve Voice  
Canada**

# **Clinician-Focused Factsheet**

## Who We Are

Heart Valve Voice Canada (HVV Canada) is a non-profit patient advocacy organization that works to improve the health and quality of life of people living with heart valve disease.

We advocate for increased and early diagnosis, timely access to appropriate treatment, removal of barriers to receiving that diagnosis and treatment, and ensuring meaningful support systems for those affected by heart valve disease.

Our advocacy network includes patients and their support systems, a multi-disciplinary group of health care professionals, and other cardiac and patient advocacy and service organizations.

## Our Aim

HVV Canada aims to improve the diagnosis, treatment, and management of heart valve disease by raising awareness of its severity and the need for early detection to ensure all patients receive the right treatment at the right time.



# Diagnosing Heart Valve Disease



When diagnosing heart valve disease, it is important to watch for common signs and symptoms that are often overlooked due to their common occurrences and/or being seen as a natural part of ageing. They include, but are not limited to:

- Shortness of breath
- Fainting
- Coughing
- Chest tightness and/or pain
- Fatigue
- Light-headedness or dizziness
- Abnormal heart rhythm sensations (i.e. irregular heartbeat)

Diagnosing heart valve disease often starts with a stethoscope check and listening for a characteristic heart “murmur” or “click-murmur”, which is usually followed by a more sophisticated investigation, including echocardiograms, to understand the exact type of heart valve disease and the severity of the abnormality.

## Stethoscope Checks in Canada

Although the number of older people in Canada receiving stethoscope checks at every visit to their GP increased in recent years (2019: 46%, 2017: 44%), there is substantial variance across the nation. Surveyed people living in Manitoba (60%) are three times more likely to receive the simple check compared to those living in New Brunswick (9%). Older women in Canada continue to be less likely to receive a stethoscope check at every visit than older men (2019: men 48%, women 44%; 2017: men: 50%, women 39%).

That’s why it’s increasingly important to perform stethoscope checks and be cognizant of checking patients for heart valve disease when their symptoms may be dismissible as other conditions or easily attributed to other factors.

Source: Censuwide (2019) Heart Health Survey –research of 1,001 Canadians over the aged of 60.

# The Importance of Referring Patients

When family physicians refer patients from primary to secondary care, they support a timely transition that helps prevent delays in treatment which can lead to worse outcomes and sicker patients. Having confidence to refer patients also helps reduce increased backlogs among healthcare systems by ensuring that patients can have their consultations, begin a monitoring routine, and prepare for and schedule treatment in a timely way.

## Types of Heart Valve Disease

The primary types of heart valve disease are:

### **Valve Stenosis or Obstruction**

As a result of certain medical conditions or anatomical abnormalities, a valve can progressively narrow, known as having a stenosis, or have a blockage or obstruction.

### **Valve Regurgitation or Insufficiency**

When a valve fails to fully close, the valve itself can become “leaky”, allowing blood to backwash down through the valve, known as regurgitation. This condition includes mitral regurgitation and aortic regurgitation.

## Treating Heart Valve Disease

A patient’s prognosis can be greatly improved with earlier diagnosis and treatment of heart valve disease. Therefore, it’s important to regularly monitor the symptoms of patients to ensure the most appropriate form of treatment is being advised. These types of treatments may be suitable for patients who are at higher risk for the more traditional forms of surgery.

### **Traditional Surgery**

Treatment generally requires either valve repair or replacement through surgery. In some cases, the aortic valve can be repaired during surgery and the patient’s valve function restored, however in most cases, aortic valve replacement requires implantation of either a mechanical valve or a tissue valve from an animal. Mitral valves are more commonly treated with repair procedures but can also require a valve replacement.

### **Minimally Invasive**

There are more innovative and less invasive approaches available, such as the transcatheter aortic valve implantation (TAVI), as well as minimally invasive aortic and mitral surgeries.



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## Contact Us

Visit our website or email us for additional resources and information on heart valve disease.

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