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Canada's ER crisis: Doctors urge governments to stop finger-pointing and find solutions

Emergency room doctors say patients are experiencing "longer" wait times in ERs across the country and it's time federal and provincial governments stop pointing fingers over the "crisis" in health care and instead come up with solutions.

Hospitals across Canada are experiencing a "perfect storm" of pressures that have resulted in overcrowded emergency departments and wait times that can sometimes stretch to up to 20 hours, Dr. Rodrick Lim, medical director and section head at London Health Sciences Centre's pediatric emergency department told Mercedes Stephenson in an interview on The West Block.

"It's every doctor's 'worst nightmare,' he said. "The thought of anyone waiting longer than they have to in a waiting room and something happening to them because of that is every health-care worker's nightmare," Lim said.

"It's just something that we don't want to think about but, unfortunately, there are stories about this happening coming across the country right now."

Front-line workers in hospitals across the country have been sounding the alarm about what they call a "crisis" in their ERs, due to a combination of factors that has forced many hospitals to close their emergency departments temporarily over the last several months.

Significant nursing shortages is one of the biggest concerns, which has led

to bed closures in both emergency departments and within medical units in hospitals. This means fewer available beds and personnel to care for patients at a time when hospitals are also seeing a significant influx of sick Canadians. Many have no choice but to go to ERs as they are unable to access primary care thanks to a national shortage of family physicians.

Meanwhile, health workers already burned out from working flat-out during the last two-and-a-half years of the pandemic are now left short-staffed amid a surge in patients due to waves of COVID-19 continuing and an unusually early start to the respiratory virus season.

The situation is particularly acute in children's hospitals in many parts of the country, including Ontario, where pediatric units seeing an early spike in RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) cases are warning parents of significant wait times.

"It's a tough situation... We are seeing quite a surge in RSV earlier than we traditionally see it," Lim said.

"At the current time, there's a tremendous strain on both emergency departments, inpatient wards and ICU capacity across the country."

Dr. David Carr, an emergency physician and clinical investigator at the University Health Network in Toronto, says emergency departments are a kind of barometer of the health system, and there are some "alarming signals" right now.

With so many nurses retiring early

As the cost of living continues to soar, Canadians with disabilities are fighting for financial support from the federal government in the face of a possible recession.

Sponsored by Minister of Employment Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Carla Qualtrough, the government is working to establish federal support for Canadians with disabilities who are living in poverty.

Known as the Canada Disability Benefit Act, a "consequential" amendment to the Income Tax Act would also be made should pass.

Advocates are urging the government to move on quickly. "People with disabilities face barriers in our society. People with disabilities living in poverty face even further barriers," Rabia Khedr, national director at Disability Without Poverty (DWP), told Global News.

"This struggle to survive with dignity is becoming worse and worse for people with disabilities," she said. The bill was first introduced in 2021 before the last federal election and numbered C-35. But as parliament dissolved, the bill stalled.

"It died with the end of the last parliament," Khedr said. Reintroduced as Bill C-22 this year on June 2, the act passed its second reading with unanimous support in the House of Commons on Oct. 18.

"We are pushing really hard for this benefit because for people with disabilities - with rising inflation and the ongoing circumstances around pandemic recovery - they're falling even further behind than they were pre-pandemic," said Khedr.

"This benefit is going to be a life

Why Bill C-22 will be a 'life-saver' for many Canadians amid possible recession

Khedr, who has been a part of DWP since its inception at the beginning of 2021, wants to see the bill passed this year and funds delivered by next fall.

"Pass Bill C-22 in 2022. Let's not delay," she said. On Oct. 19, DWP showed their support for the bill by rallying at Parliament Hill in Ottawa. They used their protest signs to transform parking spaces across the downtown into accessible spots.

"Imagine if everything was, in fact, accessible around here," Khedr said. "Who would the eligible?"

There are still unanswered questions when it comes to eligibility and how much people would receive from the government under the benefit, but once passed, the particulars will be made clear as part of the Regulatory process, according to Tara Besopport, press secretary for Qualtrough.

"The details of the benefit, including the benefit amount, and eligibility criteria, will be informed by engagement with persons with disabilities and the provinces and territories," Besopport told Global News.

"We're working hard and fast to get this done for Canadians. Throughout this time, we haven't stopped working to support people in need, including people with disabilities,"

"Bill C-22 would give us the



There are still questions about how the act will be federally coordinated with other provincial benefits, but the government is "working closely with the provinces and territories to ensure harmonization on the design," Besopport said.

"The Minister's number one concern with this benefit is to ensure that everyone who receives it is better off. This is an income supplement, not an income replacement," she said, noting the bill is a priority for the federal government.

"Twenty-three per cent of Canadians identify as having a disability. We are the largest minority. We are a family member, a friend, a neighbour and a co-worker," Qualtrough said during a speech in the House in Sept.

"The disability community is vibrant, talented and diverse," she said.

"This will provide them the dignity they need to live and thrive," she said.

However, even after the bill passes the committee stage there is still a long way to go before it officially becomes law.

When the study is completed, there will be a report stage and a final reading in the House before the bill reaches the Senate.

Why is it important? Though inflation is slowing - down to 6.9 per cent in September compared with a high of 8.1 per cent in June - it remains one of the biggest concerns both for Canadians and the government.

The Bank of Canada has been combing decades-high inflation with aggressive interest rate hikes since March. The central bank raised interest rates last week for the sixth time this year, with the half-percentage point rate hike bringing its key interest rate to 3.75 per cent.

According to Khedr, it's time to help people with disabilities. "Investing in lifting people with disabilities out of poverty, of ending disability poverty, is also an investment in our economy," Khedr said.

"People with disabilities have the buying power of \$47 billion in our economy. We will be adding a few more billions if we give them a top-up benefit that will stimulate the economy and be beneficial all."

Though there is still more work to be done, to see the bill passed would be an "important milestone in the journey of improving the quality of life for people living with disabilities," for Khedr.

"This will provide them the dignity they need to live and thrive," she said.

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Survey suggests 20 per cent of Canadians skipping meals to cut down on food costs

Laura O'Connor says more people in Saskatoon are struggling to get food for themselves and their families as prices in grocery stores rise.

"We are definitely seeing an increase and have been noticing that since January," said O'Connor, executive director of the Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre. The majority of respondents in a Canada-wide survey released Monday said they are using coupons or hunting for sales to cope with increasing food costs. Nearly 20 per cent were also reducing meal sizes or skipping meals altogether in order to save money.

The survey by the Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research at the University of Saskatchewan was conducted from Sept. 6 to Oct. 17. It asked 1,001 people about strategies to cope with increasing food costs.

Statistics Canada's consumer price index report said while the country's annual inflation rate dropped slightly to 6.9 per cent in September, the cost

of groceries continued to climb. Grocery prices increased at the fastest rate since August 1981, with prices up 11.4 per cent compared to a year ago.

In adapting to the rising costs, most respondents in the survey said they have been cutting coupons. A majority — almost 59 per cent — were also decreasing their household food waste.

Fifty-four per cent also made meal plans to ensure they had adequate funds for food.

Troubling strategies were less common but still too prevalent, said Jessica McCutcheon, associate director of the research hub.

Just over 30 per cent of respondents said they were eating less healthy food because it was cheaper. Nearly five per cent had stolen food out of necessity, and about five per cent had used a food bank or community fridge.

A recent report from Food Banks Canada said there were nearly 1.5 million visits to food banks in March.

a figure that was 15 per cent higher than the number of visits in the same month last year and 35 per cent higher than visits in March 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

The survey said people in the Prairie provinces were much more likely to have used emergency measures for food.

"Alberta and Saskatchewan have some of the highest food bank usage rates across Canada," McCutcheon said.

In Saskatoon, O'Connor said the numbers of people using the food bank are some of the highest staff have seen. There's also a worrisome increase in the number of students and seniors coming in, she said.

The survey found young people, aged 18 to 34, were more likely to have used a food bank or community fridge. They were also less likely to feel that they could afford to eat a balanced diet. Those 35 to 54 were more likely to have used coupons or purchased sale items.

Quebec saw the steepest increase in food insecurity, with 95 per cent of respondents there said they could afford to eat a balanced diet.

"It could be because Quebec just has a more robust social security net with their policies," said McCutcheon.

The survey asked about government strategies to deal with food insecurity. Most supported increased funds to community gardens, food banks and implementing a universal healthy school food program. And there was support for grocery subsidies for low-income households and government support for farmers and producers.

Most respondents — just over 79 per cent — supported an increase in the minimum wage in their provinces. However, there was opposition to strategies that saw an increase or creation of taxes.

People in Quebec said they were supportive of an increase in minimum wage, a tax on sugar and an increase in carbon emission penalties. Those on the Prairies were much more likely to oppose these taxes.

To deal with food insecurity, O'Connor said, you have to deal with the root causes of poverty. The Saskatoon food bank also has programs around education, employment strategies and filing taxes.

Ontario education workers will be off the job Friday despite anti-strike legislation, CUPE says

The union representing some 55,000 Ontario education workers says its members will walk off the job Friday in a province-wide protest, regardless of Ontario's proposed anti-strike legislation.

At a news conference Monday, the union said education workers will "withdraw their labour" to protest against the move by the province, which they called a "monstrous overreach."

The Ontario government introduced legislation Monday that it intended to use the notwithstanding clause to impose a contract on education workers and avert a strike that was set to start Friday. The clause — or Section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms — gives provincial legislatures or Parliament the ability, through the passage of a law, to override certain portions of the charter for a five-year term.

Education workers could face fines of up to \$4,000 per day should they strike, the legislation states.

The union held the news conference hours after the provincial government announced it plans to bring in legislation to block the potential job action.

CUPE has said it will explore every avenue to fight the bill, but the government said it intends to use the notwithstanding clause to keep the eventual law in force despite any constitutional challenges.

Speaking to reporters Monday afternoon, Ontario Education Minister Stephen Leacock called the union's decision to proceed with striking "unacceptable."

"The government has been left with no choice but to take immediate action today," Leacock said, indicating the union rejected his latest offer, adding he believes the legislation is in fact constitutional.

The government had been offering raises of two per cent a year for workers making less than \$40,000 and 1.25 per cent for all others. The education minister said the new deal would give 2.5 per cent annual raises to workers making less than \$43,000 and 1.5 per cent raises for all others.



The government is going to pass the bill. We're going to move forward," said Leacock.

The education minister said his move was not a blanket approach, saying it will continue to negotiate with other education unions.

Unclear how long protest could go on

As for whether the job action will run longer than one day, union officials said that remains to be seen.

The union also said it will come up with financial support for any consequences that workers might face for protesting in the face of the legislation.

On Sunday, education workers represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) gave the required five days' notice for job action, positioning its members — including educational assistants, custodians and early childhood educators, but not teachers — to go on full strike as early as Friday.

Several Ontario school boards have said they will shut down schools if support staff withdraw their services. The government and education workers returned to the bargaining table Sunday afternoon but there doesn't appear to have been any progress.

Union officials said the province's offer put forward Sunday would have provided only a nickel more for each worker, giving the union an ultimatum. Instead of the government holding a negotiation, officials said they learned the government intended to legislate against a strike if the union didn't acquiesce.

"If Stephen Leacock cared about kids, he wouldn't have handed \$200 to

Russia alleges Canadian-made parts in drones targeting ships

The drones used to attack Russian ships in the Black Sea in Crimea were equipped with Canadian-made parts used in the navigation systems, according to Russia's defence ministry.

It said 14 Ukrainian drones attacked the fleet in the Black Sea in the annexed Crimea Peninsula early on Saturday. Russia said its navy "repelled" the assault in the bay of Sevastopol.

The Russian ministry "conducted an examination of Canadian-made navigation modules" found in the shot-down unmanned aerial vehicles.

"According to the results of the information recovered from the navigation receiver's memory, it was established that the launch of maritime drones was carried out from the coast near the city of Odessa," the ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

The drones reportedly moved along the "main corridor" safe zone, before changing course to head for Russia's naval base in the largest city on the Crimean Peninsula, Sevastopol.

The defence ministry said one of the drones may have been launched "from aboard one of the civilian ships chartered by Kyiv or its Western masters for the export of agricultural products from the seaports of Ukraine".

Russia has accused Kyiv of planning the Sevastopol attack with the help of United Kingdom military "specialists". The UK denied the accusations.

Last month a key bridge linking Crimea to mainland Russia was partially damaged in a blast for which Moscow blamed Ukraine. Kyiv has denied its role in the attack that has attracted Russian retribution.

Russia has since carried out massive air and drone strikes across Ukraine, damaging more than one-third of its power infrastructure.

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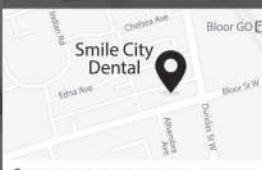
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Anushka Sharma 'eat-pray-love' with daughter Vamika in Kolkata; drops a photo dump

Bollywood actress Anushka Sharma is currently gearing up for her upcoming film Chhaka Xpress. After shooting in the UK, the actress started the Kolkata schedule of the film a few weeks back. Recently, she wrapped the latest schedule. While shooting in the city of Joy, Anushka visited several iconic places and binged on traditional delicacies there.



Sharing pictures from her Kolkata trip with daughter Vamika, Sharma dropped a photo dump and gave it a title that read, "Eat-Pray-Love". The actress gorged on Alisha phirni, Baitawat singh ki chahi, samose, Misal ice-cream and regular rasgulla, Parmout ki shebet, Gishik Chhey demul roll and Puti nam ki kachori also. Interestingly, she also visited Behar math and Kalighat temple with her daughter Vamika.

Post-wrapping the schedule, the actress-turned-entrepreneur said, "Kolkata has always had a very special place in my heart. The warmth of the city and the people, the delicious food, the beautiful architecture - I love everything about it."

Ananya Panday becomes Poo from Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham for a Halloween party; Kareena Kapoor Khan reacts

Bollywood actress Ananya Panday is celebrating her 24th birthday today. The actress caught everyone's attention with her look for the Halloween party last night before her birthday. Interestingly, birthday girl Ananya Panday has surprised everyone by recreating Kareena Kapoor's famous character 'Poo' from Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham.



All it happened at Orhan Avranmanli Halloween party. For the unversed, Orhan is actress Janvi Kapoor's close friend. After Diwali parties, now all the celebs of Bollywood attended the Halloween party on Saturday night. A theme was also kept for this party, according to which almost everyone had to recreate a popular character for the party.

The Pati Patni Aur Woh actress joined the party by recreating

her social media handle and praised the look by sharing pictures of Ananya on her Instagram stories. Kareena said, "You are looking at PHAT". She also wished Ananya on her birthday. In case you don't know, PHAT stands for Pretty, Hot And Tempting.

Apart from Ananya, Aryan Khan, Sara Ali Khan, Ibrahim Khan, Neyya Naveeli Nanda, Shanaya Kapoor, and Janvi Kapoor also attended the party with their best looks.

Coming to the birthday girl's professional front, Panday was last seen in Liger, which marked the Bollywood debut of actor Vijay Deverakonda. The film performed poorly at the box office. She has a couple of projects in her kitty, including the sequel of Ayushmann Khurrana starrer Dhadak 2.

While many are still in awe of Ananya's look, Kareena Kapoor has dropped her reaction. Bebo took to

Shah Rukh Khan, Anushka Sharma laud BCCI's decision to give equal pay to wo

This week, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Jay Shah announced that the board will bridge the pay gap between female and male cricketers by offering the same fee to international women cricketers as men. The historic and long-overdue decision is now being lauded by many. Bollywood stars including Shah Rukh Khan, Anushka Sharma and others came forward to show their appreciation.

Shah Rukh Khan took to Twitter to applaud the BCCI's decision. He wrote, "What a good front foot shot. Sports being such an equalizer (In more ways than one) hoping it will pave the way for others to follow."

Anushka Sharma who is set to play a cricketer in her upcoming film Chhaka Xpress, took to her Instagram stories to share the news with her fans.

Miller, Markram power South Africa past India at T20 World Cup

David Miller and Aiden Markram smashed half-centuries to lead South Africa to a five-wicket win over India in Perth on Sunday and put them in pole position for a semi-final berth at the Twenty20 World Cup.

South Africa's bowlers, led by Lungi Ngidi, restricted India to 133-9 in Perth and then their batsmen passed their target with two balls to spare largely due to a 76-run stand between Miller, who scored 59 not out, and Markram, who made 52.

Markram hit back with two fours but captain Temba Bavuma's dry run with the bat extended as he nicked one to the wicketkeeper Dinesh Karthik while attempting a scoop shot off Mohammed Shami.

Markram and Miller took the innings to 40-3 at the halfway mark. They then opened up against off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin with a boundary each in the 11th over but the bowler was left uncomfortable when the normally safe hands of Virat Kohli at deep midwicket dropped a routine chance for Markram, on 35.

India were dogged by sloppy fielding as Rohit Sharma missed a run-out and another catch going awry on the boundary.

Markram raised his fifty with a four and two runs off Ashwin as South Africa closed in their target. Hardik Pandya broke the stand

Bangladesh edge Zimbabwe in last-ball thriller at T20 World Cup

Bangladesh got their Twenty20 World Cup back on track on Sunday with a thrilling last-ball win over Zimbabwe, aided by opener Najmul Shanto's maiden half-century and Tasnim Ahmed's three wickets.

Shanto (71) helped steer Bangladesh to 150-7 at Brisbane's Gabba ground in a match that went to the wire with Zimbabwe needing 16 off an incredible last over.

Third time's the charm as Pakistan finally get off the mark in World Cup 2022 with win over Netherlands

Pakistan's bowlers, led by spinner Shadab Khan, helped them hammer the Netherlands by six wickets in Perth on Sunday for a first win at the Twenty20 World Cup which kept their faint hopes of reaching the semi-finals alive.

Pakistan restricted the Dutch to 91-9, and then cruised to 95-4 with 13 balls to spare as Mohammad Rizwan made 49.

But it was the bowlers set up for victory for a side that lost their opener to India and then were shocked by Zimbabwe in Group 2.

Shadab returned figures of 3-22 and pace bowler Mohammad Wasim took two wickets to set the tone for their team's domination against a Dutch side who are out of the semi-final running after losing a third straight Super 12 match.

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Immigration has never been higher, and Canadians have never been more pleased with it

Immigration surges to its highest levels in Canadian history, a new poll finds that Canada remains one of the most pro-immigration countries on Earth.

According to a telephone survey of 2,000 Canadians conducted by the Environics Institute, record-high numbers of Canadians agree with the notion that Canada "needs more immigrants." This is in tandem with record low numbers of Canadians who report a belief that "immigration levels are too high."

Environics surveys found that 58 per cent of respondents agreed with the notion that "Canada needs more immigrants to increase its population." This was an almost 180-degree turn from the sentiments of 30 years ago; the report cited a similar poll from 1993 in which 77 per cent of respondents said they didn't want immigrants growing the population.

The poll, which comes out roughly every year, was commissioned by the



Century Initiative, a group with the explicit goal of growing Canada's population to 100 million by 2100.

Nevertheless, it's in keeping with other poll data showing that Canadians are generally pleased with immigration.

In 2019, the Angus Reid Institute conducted a particularly comprehensive survey of Canadian sentiments on immigration. Although the figures weren't as decisive as those found by Environics, Angus Reid found that Canadians generally saw immigration as critical to the

economy, and weren't inclined to see immigrants as threats to their own jobs.

Although, Angus Reid also found that most of the Canadians they surveyed couldn't name the country's rate of immigration, or even where Canadian immigrants were coming from. Most respondents believed that the Arab world was the single largest source of new immigration to Canada, when the actual largest source (by a quite a margin) is South Asia.

The Environics poll comes out just as Canada reaches immigration levels

not seen since the early 20th century, when mass immigration from Europe was used to homestead the prairies. Last year, Canada brought in 401,000 new permanent residents; the equivalent to adding an extra Halifax in just 12 months.

According to recent projections by Stats Canada, should these trends continue, by 2041 the country will have 50 million people, half of whom are either immigrants or the children of one. Just last week, new census data showed that 23 per cent of those counted are either landed immigrants or permanent residents.

Canada is unique among Western countries for having almost no anti-immigration sentiment in its national political discourse. During the most recent Conservative leadership race, for instance, every candidate expressed either accord with current immigration rates, or a belief that they should probably be higher (and two of those candidates were immigrants themselves).

One key contributor to this may be the fact that Canada is particularly chummy with who it lets in. Beginning in 1967, Canada pioneered the world's first "points-based" immigration system specifically designed to prioritize newcomers based on their ability to contribute to the economy and integrate into Canadian society.

It's also going to increase," Kelly said.

Kelly said whether or not your rates will increase depends on the company you get your insurance from, where you live and other characteristics that factor into your premiums such as your claims history and the type of vehicle you drive.

Ways to reduce your rates

Experts say there are a number of things you can do to ease the pain of rising insurances.

Shop around and compare rates. Unlike other provinces across Canada that have a single, public insurer, Ontario has dozens of companies that offer car insurance. This makes it possible to compare plans and prices. Speak to an insurance broker or check out a price comparison website to find a rate that works for you. Kelly recommended young drivers seek out plans that charge based on the amount they drive - something that can lead to lower rates in months where they don't get behind the wheel too often.

Choose coverage that fits. Drivers of older cars with little market value may want to consider not purchasing optional add-on coverage like collision and comprehensive coverage. For example, if you own a 15-year-old car that's worth less than \$500, it might not be worth it or even possible to replace it after an accident.

Your car insurance premiums could be rising soon. Here's what you can do to ease the pain

If you have to renew your car insurance any time soon, prepare for a possible rate increase on your renewal notice.

More than two dozen private insurance companies in Ontario have received permission from the provincial regulator to raise premiums in the coming months, and industry experts say the trend is likely to continue.

"I wish I had good news for consumers, but everything I'm hearing is that rates are increasing," said John Shmuel, managing editor of insurance and financial website RatesDotCa.

"I really don't know if my insurance companies right now are going to be able to keep their car insurances flat."

Along with inflation rates that are the highest in decades, higher car insurance premiums would be another hit to the wallet of Ontario consumers. But the good news is there are ways to reduce what you pay.

Pandemic driving slowdown

Over the last two-and-a-half years, car insurance companies processed fewer claims compared to the pre-pandemic period. Lockdowns and the shift to working from home meant fewer drivers on the roads and fewer accidents. Companies responded by decreasing rates, keeping them flat. Some even provided rebates to customers.

The Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario (FSRA), which oversees the car insurance market and is responsible for evaluating and approving any rate hikes, approved zero rate increases in 2020 and only one in 2021 - for 0.29 per cent. But this year, the FSRA has approved 31 rate increases, according to a public database on its website.

Companies are seeking to raise rates now because their costs are increasing as driving rates return to normal, Shmuel said.

"Anywhere you look in the system, there's just more costs," he said.

Inflation is driving up the cost of

new, used and rental cars as well as car parts. Lingering supply chain issues are making it hard to get parts on time.

Some of the reasons for rising costs for insurance companies pre-date the pandemic, Shmuel said, such as how the increasingly complex design of cars has made it more difficult to repair them.

A recent spike in auto thefts across the Greater Toronto Area could also put upward pressure on rates as insurance companies pay out more to replace stolen vehicles, Shmuel said.

Mary Kelly, a professor of finance at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont., said the cost of providing health care to accident victims, such as rehabilitation and disability benefits, is another factor driving up costs for insurance companies.

"We know medical costs always increase (so if) the likelihood that you're going to be in an accident is greater because we've gone back to pre-pandemic levels, then those costs

RCMP investigating Chinese 'police' stations in Canada



The RCMP says it's investigating Chinese "police" stations in Canada.

This comes after the Spain-based human rights group Safeguard Defenders reported that more than 50 exist worldwide, including three in the Greater Toronto Area in predominantly Chinese communities.

They include a residential home and single-storey commercial building in Markham and a convenience store in Scarborough.

"In most countries, we believe it's a network of individuals, rather than a physical police station where people will be dragged into," said Laura Harth, a campaign director at Safeguard Defenders.

"It's completely illegal under international law. It's a severe violation of territorial sovereignty."

In a statement to CBC in response to questions about these stations, the Chinese embassy said local authorities in Fujian, China, had set up an online service platform to assist Chinese nationals abroad.

But Safeguard Defenders said there is evidence individuals connected to these stations have been involved in persuading nationals suspected of committing crimes to return to China to face criminal proceedings.

Foreign states may 'intimidate or harm' communities: RCMP

CBC News has not been able to corroborate that, but in a statement, the RCMP said it's investigating reports of criminal activity in relation to these so-called "police" stations.

The RCMP also said it takes "threats to the security of individuals living in Canada very seriously and is aware that foreign states may seek to intimidate or harm communities or individuals within Canada."

"This is an outrageous intrusion on Canadian sovereignty," said Conservative MP Michael Cheng.

"We've heard of threats directly targeting people who are advocating for minority rights in China, such as those from the Uyghur and Tibetan communities. These stations are now another tool that Beijing can use to repress Canadians here in the Chinese community in Canada," he said.

"The government needs to take immediate action. At minimum, they should be hauling the Chinese ambassador to Canada on the carpet through a formal demarche and strongly voicing our outrage."

Pursuing fraud suspects abroad

The statement from the Chinese embassy did not address reports of intimidation, but earlier this year, China's state-run newspaper Global Times reported that 230,000 people suspected of telecom fraud were "persuaded to return to China from overseas to confess crimes from April 2021 to July 2022."

In September, China adopted an Anti-Telecom and Online Fraud Law with the aim of tackling telecom and online fraud in China and abroad.

"There may be those that are guilty of economic crimes. We also know these kinds of campaigns have been used to target dissidents, critics of the regime, even those within the Communist Party - those that might have stood up to [President] Xi Jinping himself," said Harth.

"These kinds of operations go from harassing and threatening family members back home to sending covert agents abroad to approach the target directly and coerce them into returning home," she said. "[The] worst case scenario is those where they even lure or entrap people to a third country, from where they can have them returned - or even kidnapings."

At a House of Commons special committee on Canada-China relations on Oct. 4, Cheng questioned Global Affairs officials about the existence of the police stations reported in media outlets.

"There is space for legitimate police liaison to cooperate, state to state," said Weldon Epp, director general of North Asia and Oceania at Global Affairs, in response to Cheng's question.

"But the allegations reported in the press would fall well outside of that, and we would have deep concerns if they proved to be true."

Epp said Global Affairs was working with partner agencies to confirm the allegations.

CBC reached out to Global Affairs and Public Safety Canada for comment, but both federal agencies

deferred to the RCMP's statement.

Dissidents fear being targeted

Journalist and human rights advocate Sheng Xue moved to Canada after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre to flee repression.

She said she's been repeatedly targeted by Chinese officials online for her activism and was arrested in Beijing in 1996 when she traveled there to visit her mother, as well as in Hong Kong in 2008. In both instances, Xue said she was forced to leave after being detained.

"They want to destroy my reputation. But since I am in Canada, they cannot just kidnap me or kill me, like many of my friends in Thailand or Vietnam [or] Hong Kong," she said. "[But] now the Chinese police station [is] here, just a few kilometres from me, so I am asking myself, where else can I escape to?"

Xue said some Chinese nationals in Canada may choose to co-operate with Chinese officials out of fear for family members back home.

Uyghur activist Rakiye Turdash says many members of her community in Canada are afraid to publicly criticize China's actions toward the Uyghur Muslim minority because of possible repercussions for family in China.

"They live in Canada [and] they can't freely speak up like me," she said.

A 2021 report drafted by the Montreal-based Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights and a Washington, D.C.-based think-tank concluded that China "bears state responsibility for an ongoing genocide" against Uyghurs.

Detailed serious abuses, including mass internment, family separation and forced sterilization and abortions. China has denied the allegations, claiming the crackdown on Uyghurs is about countering extremism.

Turdash fled China's western Xinjiang region in the 1990s after her brother was killed by Chinese soldiers for protesting against Chinese influence in the region.

Turdash said several Uyghur students in Canada told her "they were intimidated by Chinese police online and [the police] threatened them, threatened ... to return [them] to China." She said she doesn't know where they are located because the harassment happened virtually.

Turdash said that out of fear for their safety, she hasn't communicated with members of her own family back

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