

A Comparative Review of Health and Wellness Systems in Nigeria and Canada, 2025: Challenges, Progress, and Pathways to Better Wellbeing

Onome Maureen Osuetha*

Independent Researcher Health/ Wellness Analyst Imo State University, Owerri

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Health and wellness play an important role in determining how developed and happy a country's people are. This review article takes a look at the healthcare systems in Nigeria and Canada, comparing how both countries organize, fund, and deliver health services to their citizens. It also looks at how social and economic factors such as government spending, and health education affect people's overall well-being. The study draws insight from books, research papers, government reports, and international health data to give a clear picture of both systems. In Canada, healthcare is publicly funded and available to everyone, which makes it easier for citizens to access medical services and maintain better health. In contrast, Nigeria faces several challenges including poor funding, lack of modern health facilities, and limited access to quality care, especially in rural areas. These issues contribute to lower life expectancy and higher disease rates. The review concludes that Nigeria can improve its health outcomes by investing more in its healthcare system, reforming policies to ensure fair access, and promoting public awareness on healthy living.

INTRODUCTION

Good health and general wellness are some of the most important aspects of a nation's development and the well-being of its people. However, when citizens are healthy, they are more productive, can work effectively, and contribute positively to national growth. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) describes health not only as the absence of disease, but as a complete state of physical, mental, and social well-being. This means that being healthy goes beyond just treating sickness, it involves having access to clean water, good nutrition, mental stability, safe environments, and above all supportive social systems.

In many countries, the quality of health and wellness depends on how well their healthcare systems are planned and managed. Countries with stable economies and strong governance tend to have better healthcare systems that provide citizens with equal access to medical services and wellness programs (Eze, Okafor and Ibrahim, 2021). On the other hand, countries with poor healthcare structures often struggle with issues like poor funding, shortage of trained medical workers, and unequal access between the rich and poor.

Conversely, Canada and Nigeria provide two different examples of how healthcare systems can affect people's well-being. For instance, Canada has a publicly funded system known as "medicare", which allows residents to receive essential healthcare services without paying directly at the point of care (Government of Canada, 2022). This system helps reduce inequality and improves the overall life expectancy. In contrast, Nigeria's healthcare system is a mixture of public and private providers, but most citizens still pay out-of-pocket for medical services (World Bank, 2021). This makes it difficult for low-income families to access proper treatment when they are sick.

Public health awareness and education play an important role in wellness. In Canada, citizens are encouraged to take part in preventive health programs such as vaccination, mental health counseling, and nutrition education (Health Canada, 2023). In Nigeria, however, public health campaigns are often irregular and limited to urban

areas, thereby; leaving many rural communities without access to basic health information (Ogunyemi and Ojo, 2022).

Furthermore, this article compares the health and wellness systems of Nigeria and Canada. It focuses on how health policies, economic factors, and social conditions affect the well-being of people in both countries. Hence, by identifying the differences and challenges, the review aims to suggest ways Nigeria can strengthen its healthcare system and improve the wellness of its citizens.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Health and wellness systems varies across the world, depending on each country's economic strength, leadership, and commitment to public welfare. In developed countries like Canada, healthcare is prioritize as a basic human right, while in developing nations such as Nigeria, it is still considered a service that many people cannot easily afford (WHO, 2023). However, the knowledge on how both systems work will help highlight what makes one more successful than the other, and what lessons can be learned for improvement.

In Canada, healthcare is funded mainly through public taxes and guided by the principles of the Canada Health Act of 1984, which ensures that all citizens have access to medically necessary services without paying directly (Government of Canada, 2022). Each province and territory manages its own healthcare programs, but the federal government provides financial support and enforces national standards.

Furthermore, Medicare in Canada, is built on fairness and equity. This has helped Canadians to benefit from free or low-cost medical consultations, hospital care, maternity services, and preventive health programs (Health Canada, 2023). In addition, Canada invests heavily in digital health systems, telemedicine, and mental health awareness to promote overall wellness.

On the other hand, Nigeria's healthcare system is built on a three-tier structure including: primary, secondary, and tertiary levels; all of which are managed by local, state, and federal governments respectively. While this structure looks good on paper, in practice it faces several challenges. According to Ogunyemi and Ojo (2022), Nigeria's health facilities are often underfunded, poorly equipped, and understaffed, most especially in rural areas.

It is for these reasons that most citizens rely on their hard-earned money to pay for hospital bills, which makes healthcare expensive and inaccessible for low-income families. Furthermore, corruption, poor policy enforcement, and the migration of skilled medical workers to other countries worsen the situation (World Bank, 2021).

Wellness, which includes physical and mental health, is also influenced by education, nutrition, and lifestyle. Studies show that Canada's emphasis on preventive care such as health education, vaccination, and early screening has helped reduce the rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease (UNDP, 2023).

In contrast, Nigeria still focuses mainly on curative care rather than prevention. Many Nigerians do not receive regular health check-ups or adequate information about nutrition and hygiene, thus; leading to preventable illnesses (Eze, Okafor and Ibrahim, 2021). Another major difference between the two countries is health insurance coverage. In Canada, nearly 100% of citizens are covered under public insurance, thereby making healthcare accessible to everyone (Government of Canada, 2022).

In Nigeria, however, only a small percentage (less than 20%) are enrolled in the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), and the scheme mainly serves people working in government or formal sectors (UNDP, 2023). Therefore, the lack of extensive health insurance increases the financial burden on households, most especially during medical emergencies.

Furthermore, Canada's healthcare system shows how strong policies, sufficient funding, and preventive education can lead to a healthier population. Nigeria on the other hand, despite making gradual improvements

through initiatives like the Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHCDF), still faces long-standing problems that require government commitment, private sector support, and increased community involvement to achieve sustainable wellness.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NIGERIA AND CANADA

The outcome of health and wellness in any country depend on how its healthcare system is organized, financed, and managed. However, Nigeria and Canada represent two very different realities; one is a developing country with limited resources, while the other is a developed nation with a strong social welfare structure. Therefore, comparing both systems provides valuable lessons on what works and what needs to improve.

In Canada, healthcare is publicly funded and built on the concept that everyone should have equal access to medical services, irrespective of their income or social status. The system, known as ‘medicare’, covers essential health services including doctor visits, hospital care, and preventive check-ups at little or no cost to citizens (Government of Canada, 2022).

Health services are provided through provincial health ministries, and the government invests huge amounts of capital in digital health technology, telemedicine, and mental health programs to ensure that people in remote areas have access to quality care (Health Canada, 2023).

On the contrary, Nigeria’s healthcare system is a mixture of public and private services. The public sector handles most primary and secondary care, while private hospitals and clinics dominate tertiary (advanced) services. Unfortunately, public healthcare facilities in Nigeria often suffer from poor infrastructure, lack of trained medical staff, and inadequate funding (Ogunyemi and Ojo, 2022).

Moreso, many people turn to private hospitals, but these services are expensive and not affordable for most families. This makes healthcare access unequal because some persons can pay for good care, while others who cannot often rely on traditional medicine or go without treatment (World Bank, 2021).

Furthermore, the difference in government spending on health varies. Canada spends about 10.8% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on healthcare, while Nigeria on the other hand spends only around 3.2% (WHO, 2023). This funding gap affects everything from hospital equipment and staff salaries to the availability of drugs and vaccines. Hence, the result is seen in health outcomes (Table 1) such that; life expectancy in Canada is 82 years, while in Nigeria it is about 55 years (UNDP, 2023).

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Health and Wellness in Nigeria and Canada

Health Indicator	Nigeria	Canada
Health System Type	Mixed (Public and Private)	Universal Public (Medicare)
Life Expectancy	55 years	82 years
Health Expenditure (% of GDP)	3.2%	10.8%
Physician Density (per 10,000 people)	4	26
Health Insurance Coverage	< 20%	~100%
Maternal Mortality (per 100,000 births)	512	10

Going further, there is variation in wellness programs. For example, Canada has strong health promotion strategies, that is; citizens are encouraged to eat healthy, exercise regularly, and take part in preventive care programs like vaccinations and cancer screenings (Health Canada, 2023). Also, there is growing attention to mental health, with counseling and community wellness centers available across the country.

Nigeria, on the other hand, has wellness initiatives such as immunization campaigns and maternal health campaigns, but these are not consistent. For instance, many rural communities lack access to information and

medical facilities. As a result of these, poor nutrition, limited sanitation, and low awareness about preventive care contribute to diseases like malaria, typhoid, and malnutrition (Eze, Okafor and Ibrahim, 2021).

Another major difference is human resources. Canada has a high ratio of doctors and nurses to patients, while Nigeria faces a continuous “brain drain” as many health professionals migrate abroad for better opportunities (Ogunyemi and Ojo, 2022). This shortage affects the quality and availability of care, especially in rural areas.

Furthermore, Canada’s system shows the benefits of policy enforcement, adequate funding, and citizen-focused wellness programs. Despite Nigeria’s system gradual improvement, the problem of poor infrastructure, low funding, and uneven access still persists. However, with better health financing, good leadership, and consistent wellness education, Nigeria can progress more toward achieving a healthier population.

DISCUSSION

The differences between Nigeria and Canada’s health and wellness systems clearly show how economic strength, government commitment, and public awareness influence the overall well-being of citizens. While both countries recognize the importance of good health, their ability to provide accessible and effective healthcare depends on their available resources, policies, and leadership.

In Canada, healthcare is considered a shared national responsibility. The government ensures that citizens have access to medical services regardless of their income level and or location. This approach promotes fairness and reduces health inequality (Government of Canada, 2022).

Moreover, the country’s success is also tied to its focus on preventive care by encouraging healthy diets, exercise, mental health support, and regular medical check-ups. These strategies help reduce the occurrence of chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and heart conditions (Health Canada, 2023).

By contrast, Nigeria’s healthcare system faces many structural and financial challenges. Although there are several health policies in place, including the National Health Policy (2016), and the Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHCDF), implementation has been slow due to improper funding, poor infrastructure, and limited accountability (World Bank, 2021).

Additionally, many public hospitals lack essential drugs and modern equipment, and patients often wait long hours to receive care. The shortage of medical professionals due to their continuous migration of doctors and nurses abroad, further reduces the quality of healthcare services (Ogunyemi and Ojo, 2022).

Another major issue in Nigeria is the low level of health awareness. Many citizens are unaware of preventive health measures such as vaccination, hygiene, nutrition, and family planning (Eze, Okafor and Ibrahim, 2021). As a result, preventable diseases like malaria, cholera, and typhoid remain common. In contrast, Canada invests more in public health education, using media campaigns, school programs, and community initiatives to raise awareness about wellness and healthy living (Health Canada, 2023).

On top of that, mental health is another area where Canada has made significant progress compared to Nigeria. Canada integrates mental wellness into its healthcare system through counseling services, and public awareness programs. Nigeria, however, still faces social stigma around mental illness, with limited facilities and professionals dedicated to mental health care (UNDP, 2023).

Moreso, socioeconomic differences also contribute to the wellness gap. Canada’s higher income levels, social security benefits, and stable economy allow citizens to live healthier lives. In Nigeria, poverty and unemployment make it difficult for many people to afford balanced diets, quality housing, and healthcare services. According to WHO (2023), wellness is closely linked to living conditions, when people have access to clean water, good nutrition, and safe environments, their health outcomes will definitely improve significantly.

However, Nigeria has some strengths that can be built upon. The country has a growing youth population and increasing interest in digital health innovations such as mobile clinics and telemedicine (Ogunyemi and Ojo, 2022). If properly supported through funding and infrastructure, these technologies could expand healthcare access, most especially in rural areas. Also, integrating traditional medicine with modern healthcare practices can help make health services more culturally acceptable, and accessible to communities that depend on herbal treatments.

Furthermore, Canada's experience shows that effective healthcare requires good leadership, sustained investment, and public trust. Nigeria's situation, though challenging, is not hopeless. Therefore, with consistent policy reforms, improved funding, and priority given to health education, Nigeria can move toward a more equitable and wellness-driven healthcare system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the comparison between Nigeria and Canada, it is clear that improving health and wellness in Nigeria requires both strong policy action and consistent government commitment. While Nigeria has many talented healthcare professionals and several well-structured policies, these need better funding, monitoring, and execution to truly make an impact. Hence, the following recommendations will provide practical ways to strengthen Nigeria's healthcare and wellness system:

1. Nigeria should step up its health budget to at least 10% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), in line with the Abuja Declaration (2001), which urged African nations to allocate more funds to health. More investment will help upgrade medical facilities, purchase essential drugs, and improve the working conditions for health professionals (World Bank, 2021). Therefore, stable funding will also reduce the financial stress on citizens who currently pay huge amount for basic healthcare.
2. The government should make health insurance accessible to everyone, including workers in informal sectors, and rural communities. Expanding the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) to cover more people will help protect families from unexpected medical expenses and promote equal access to care (UNDP, 2023). furthermore, partnerships with private organizations can also support community-based health insurance models.
3. Nigeria's primary healthcare centers should be revitalized and equipped with well-trained staff, drugs, and diagnostic tools. These centers are closest to the people and can handle preventive care such as immunization, maternal health, and health education. However, strengthening primary healthcare will reduce overcrowding in tertiary hospitals, and improve access for rural populations (Ogunyemi and Ojo, 2022).
4. Wellness should start with awareness. Both the government and non-governmental organizations should run continuous campaigns on hygiene, nutrition, exercise, mental health, and disease prevention. Schools, religious centers, and media outlets can play essential role in spreading health information and correcting false beliefs (Eze, Okafor and Ibrahim, 2021).
5. The use of technology can also help bridge the urban-rural healthcare gap. Nigeria can follow Canada's example by promoting telemedicine, electronic health records, and mobile health applications (Health Canada, 2023). These innovations will allow patients in remote areas to consult doctors, receive follow-up care, and access health education from their phones.
6. The government should introduce better incentives, fair salaries, and career growth opportunities to discourage the migration of healthcare workers abroad. Also, continuous training and professional development can also boost the morale of healthcare workers, and improve service delivery (WHO, 2023).
7. Many Nigerians still rely on traditional remedies. Therefore, integrating safe and scientifically tested traditional medicine into the national health system can increase accessibility and cultural acceptance of healthcare services (Ogunyemi and Ojo, 2022).
8. Nigeria should prioritize mental health care by building more counseling centers, training psychologists, and raising awareness to reduce stigma, by adopting Canada's model of community-based mental health support as a guide (Government of Canada, 2022).

Furthermore, by adopting these recommendations, Nigeria can move toward a more balanced and inclusive healthcare system, one that focuses not just on curing diseases, but also on promoting overall wellness. Therefore, strong leadership, consistent funding, and active citizen participation are re-quiste to achieving this goal.

CONCLUSION

Health and wellness are primary indicators of a nation's strength and quality of life. This review compared the healthcare systems of Nigeria and Canada, showing how policy, funding, and social factors shape the wellbeing of their citizens. From the findings, it is clear that while Canada has achieved a strong and reliable healthcare system that provides universal access to medical services, Nigeria continues to face serious challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, limited health workers, and unequal access— especially in rural communities (World Bank, 2022; Adebayo and Olanrewaju, 2021).

The study also revealed that Canada's success in maintaining a high level of public wellness is due to its commitment to universal healthcare coverage, efficient management, and continuous investment in health promotion and education (Martin *et al.*, 2018; Government of Canada, 2023). On the other hand, Nigeria's healthcare system depends on huge capital involvement, and weak policy implementation, which make it difficult for many citizens to afford or access essential health services.

Furthermore, to improve health and wellness in Nigeria, there is a need for better political will, proper funding, and effective public health education. Encouraging health insurance coverage, upgrading rural health facilities, and promoting community-based health initiatives can help reduce health inequalities and improve wellness outcomes across the country. Hence, by learning from Canada's model and adapting it to local realities, Nigeria can build a more inclusive and sustainable healthcare system that ensures every citizen has the opportunity to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

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