With an aging population, the need for diagnostic services such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is growing in every province in Canada. At the hospitals which have MRI services, there are no wait times for patients in emergency situations. For patients who require diagnostic services for non-emergency conditions (e.g., hip or knee replacements), the wait times for MRI services can range from days to weeks to months. In the province of Ontario, the government has made it a priority to reduce waiting times for MRI services. As a way of communicating the progress in reducing waiting times, the provincial government has a website that publishes monthly waiting times at each public hospital which has an MRI unit.

This paper is divided into four main parts. In Part I, how geographic access is framed theoretically is discussed. In Part II, how geographic access to MRI services is framed as a policy in Canada and Ontario is described. Framed by Parts I and II, using the locations of MRI services and wait times based on the Ontario government website, the results of a structural analysis of how wait times have changed over time and space from December 2013 to July 2014 is presented. Using data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), results of a behavioural analysis are presented to deepen the understanding of why policies to improve access to MRI services are not working. The temporal and geographic variations in wait times raise questions about the success of the government’s policies and more broadly about social justice in a demographically and socio-economically diverse population spread over a large geographic area.

Light refreshments and snacks will be provided.