



NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

People with lower incomes most affected by family doctor shortage

For immediate release – October 9, 2019

St. John’s, NL – Everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador is equally entitled to receive the care of a family doctor, but the NLMA’s new survey results show that the shortage of family doctors has the greatest burden on people in the lowest income brackets.

On September 17, the NLMA released a new poll conducted by Narrative Research which showed that 19%, or about 99,000 people in Newfoundland and Labrador, do not have a family doctor. Further analysis of those results reveals that the burden of not having regular access to a family physician falls disproportionately on people with lower incomes.

“Evidence tells us that income is a key predictor of health status,” said NLMA President Dr. Charlene Fitzgerald. “This was reinforced by our latest survey results, which revealed a staggering inequity when it comes to income and access to family physicians.”

Among residents surveyed, 26% of those with household incomes less than \$50,000 per year had no family doctor. Among those with household incomes between \$50-100,000, 21% reported having no family doctor. In comparison, only 7% of those with household incomes above \$100,000 reported having no family doctor.

“Every citizen has a right to be attached to a family doctor. When a person is unable to access primary care because there are no family doctors available, chronic diseases and acute illness can go untreated. If you are living on a low income, you are at an even greater risk,” said Dr. Fitzgerald.

People living on lower incomes may have greater difficulty accessing affordable transportation to travel to doctors in different locations. Some may face even greater challenges, including food insecurity, inadequate living conditions or inability to navigate the health system.

The NLMA met with the Minister of Health in September to address the growing number of orphaned patients in the province. The NLMA and Government agreed to establish a committee to focus on short and long-term solutions. The committee held its initial meeting last month and will continue its work over the coming weeks.

“Short term and long-term solutions are needed to ensure we have the right number of family doctors in the province to meet the needs of our population,” said Dr. Fitzgerald.

“Physicians pledge to continue to work with government to ensure social equity and to prevent vulnerable people in our communities from falling through the cracks.”

-30-

Media Contact:

Jonathan Carpenter
(709) 726-7424, ext. 303
JCarpenter@nlma.nl.ca

NEWS RELEASE