



**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR  
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

**Finance Minister does not tell the full story about Physician Services Budget**

**For immediate release – October 15, 2021**

**St. John's, NL – St. John's, NL** – Yesterday, outside the House of the Assembly, Finance Minister Siobhan Coady made repeated statements to the media that the province spends half a billion dollars for 1,333 doctors. Her blanket remarks do not tell the full story. Suggesting that \$500 million goes to 1,300 doctors' salaries is false. The provincial Physician Services Budget includes much more than physician salaries. For example:

- It also pays tens of millions that physicians use to pay for medical clinics, utilities, medical equipment, technology, and clinic employees.
- It pays for replacement locum physicians when there are no doctors available to cover a service, an expense that would go down if we had the right number of full-time doctors.

“Physicians have been without a contract for more than four years. Since then, most specialties have fallen below the Atlantic average. The pay gap has significantly widened for family medicine. These physicians are the lowest paid in the country,” says NLMA President Dr. Susan MacDonald.

“Our focus is on providing patient care – 99,000 patients do not have a family doctor and their health is suffering. We need more doctors, it's as simple as that. If we keep losing doctors, the problems for patients will get worse. We don't create the salary rates for physicians across the country, but we have to be able to compete with them. If we're not at least competitive with the other Atlantic Provinces, then we won't attract new doctors here.” she added.

Minister Coady says that doctors are still being hired. This is only partly true. In 2019, The Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) reported that 103 physicians left Newfoundland and Labrador for other provinces and 19 physicians came here – a net loss of 84.

So far this year, the NLMA knows of 66 doctors who have left the province, and not all departures are reported to the Association. The NLMA will have a more accurate number at the end of the year.

The government is currently advertising more than 100 full-time vacant physician positions on its Practice-NL website. This does not even factor in the number of family physicians that are needed in the community.

In 2019, the NLMA commissioned an independent, evidence-based physician human resource forecast that showed an immediate need for 60 new full-time family doctors in 2020, and about 20 more per year over the coming decade. Given the number of physicians who have left the province since 2019, the NLMA believes the number of family doctors that are needed is likely higher now.

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Patients are older and sicker, and physicians are not able to see as many in clinic per day. Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest death rates for cancer, cardiac disease and stroke. The province also has the highest rate of chronic disease in Canada and a higher proportion of seniors living with three or more chronic diseases.

“We need better, longer-term solutions. However, Minister Coady did not deny yesterday that that the provincial government will make zero new investment in the physician services budget to improve the province’s recruitment and retention problem. It was an admission that the government is not willing to add anything to address the physician shortage or assist the 99,000 people without a family doctor,” says Dr. MacDonald.

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