

# President's Letter

May 5, 2022



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## Meetings with Premier and Health Minister on Rural Health Centres and Surgical backlog

Dear Colleagues:

The NLMA has been vocal in the media in recent weeks on two main issues. The plight of rural health centres, often called Category B Emergency Sites, is one component of the broader family physician shortage, but requires attention in its own right because of the acuteness of the vacancy problem covering almost a fifth of the people of the province who live in rural regions. The situation with surgical backlog also requires high profile attention because the backlog is not improving despite the effort to return to normal operations.

For each of these issues, the Premier reached out for a meeting with the NLMA to review our recommendations and seek collaboration. The outcomes of these meetings are as follows:

### 1. Rural Health Centres

Our key message to government is that these 20 health centres need special treatment because the vacancy situation is critical. The minimum complement for each site is 3 or 4 doctors, to provide family practice services for the region, and ER and hospitalist services on-site.

Unfortunately, as vacancies became widespread, with some sites not even able to keep their emergency departments open, the main response has been to set up virtual care ERs or ER diversions. These measures are not solutions to the underlying problems.

Therefore, we proposed short-term measures to stabilize the physician group still remaining at these sites, short-term measures to increase temporary capacity, and medium-term ideas to achieve regular staffing levels.

During the meeting on April 14th, the Premier and Minister of Health welcomed our recommendations and committed to evaluate them. At the meeting on May 4<sup>th</sup>, they told us that the evaluation was complete, and they agree substantially with all of our points. We will re-engage with government in the coming days to get more detailed feedback on how the recommendations will be implemented.

### 2. Surgical Backlog

Our key message to government is that the backlog situation in many regions, particularly St. John's, is not improving. We need a plan developed in conjunction with frontline surgeons and other providers to tackle the tough issues.

In the May 4<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Premier agreed that a task force will be established to undertake this work, involving surgeons and other disciplines. Among other things, the task force will be asked to provide advice on how to spend the new federal funding allocated to provincial governments for reducing waitlists. The Premier and the Minister also said that the government will be more transparent when it comes to waitlist data.

We believe these are good first steps and we will now work with government to establish the task force and ensure surgical groups in all disciplines and sites have an opportunity to inject their ideas and recommendations.

As always I appreciate your feedback and I encourage you to send me your thoughts at [president@nlma.nl.ca](mailto:president@nlma.nl.ca)

Sincerely,

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President

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