



Kris Luscombe
MD, FRCPC

NLMA Meeting with Minister to Discuss 811 Virtual Care Services

Dear Colleagues:

Earlier this week, the NLMA learned new details of the government's contract with Fonemed, the company that designed and actively administers the province's 811 HealthLine. The NLMA informed members of this information via a [President's Letter sent on December 6](#) and following the release of that letter, I spoke with several media outlets to voice the concerns of the NLMA and its members.

Minister Osborne confirmed yesterday that the component of the Fonemed contract that provides virtual patient visits with a nurse practitioner is available 12 hours a day. Fonemed receives \$82 per call. This part of the Fonemed contract is analogous to family physician work, yet Fonemed receives about double what MCP pays to family physicians. The Minister's explanation that higher costs are associated with a 24/7 service is not applicable to the nurse practitioner virtual care service. Therefore, the question remains, why is government paying so much for this service?

Family medicine is the heart of the health care system. Having access to the same, trusted family doctor over the long-term, who can provide both virtual and in-person visits, is the gold standard of medical care in Canada. The NLMA will not accept the continued devaluing of family medicine in this province.

Family medicine is in crisis. There is a staggering number of people without a family doctor. There are physician shortages and overburdened emergency departments, including at the Janeway. This year we've seen closures and diversions of rural emergency departments. The health care workforce is struggling to keep the system afloat. Family physicians are already feeling demoralized, overwhelmed, and undervalued. To see such a large discrepancy between physician rates and what is being paid for non-physician virtual care through 811 has exacerbated the already tense feelings of family physicians.

Minister Tom Osborne said in the media he is willing to meet with the Medical Association, so we will take him up on his offer. We are eager to learn why primary care services provided by family doctors are not valued the same as the 811 virtual care service. We have contacted the minister's office to set up a meeting and we will continue to keep members informed as new information becomes available.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "K. Luscombe".

Kris Luscombe
President

The logo for the Newfoundland & Labrador Medical Association, featuring a stylized signature.

**Newfoundland &
Labrador Medical
Association**
164 MacDonald Dr.
St. John's, NL
A1A 4B3
(709) 726-7424
Or 1-800-563-2003
Fax: (709) 726-7525
www.nlma.nl.ca
president@nlma.nl.ca