

NLIS 8

Health and Community Services

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Creative Solutions to Combat Physician Shortages Continue Through Collaboration with College of Physicians and Surgeons

In an effort to find creative solutions to address the physician shortage in the province, the Provincial Government and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Newfoundland and Labrador are working on a number of initiatives to address the local situation. The Provincial Government is continuing in its efforts to attract and retain physicians through a number of measures, including finding ways to remove barriers for those who have moved to Newfoundland and Labrador from other parts of Canada and other countries.

The initiatives include:

1. Exploration of new alternate pathways for licensing;
2. Full review of all licensing and registration criteria for physicians, in an effort to identify any barriers which may currently exist;
3. Streamlining of the licence application process; and,
4. Working with other Canadian medical regulatory authorities regarding licence mobility.

These initiatives continue to support the mandate of the College, while also potentially benefiting the provincial health care system overall by increasing the available pool of practicing physicians.

While recruitment and retention challenges are not unique to Newfoundland and Labrador, government continues to work closely with the Regional Health Authorities and all stakeholders on how to best address these matters. Government remains dedicated to working collaboratively with stakeholders like the College of Physicians and Surgeons toward better health outcomes for the residents of the province.

The recruitment and retention of health care professionals has been - and continues to be - a challenge, not just in Newfoundland and Labrador, but indeed globally. Health Accord NL was created in November 2020 to reimagine the health care system to best deliver services to people in communities across the province. It was mandated to deliver a 10-year Health Accord with short, medium, and long-term goals for a health care system that better meets the current needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. A number of the initiatives are already underway, with additional recommendations announced as part of Budget 2022.

Details on these initiatives can be found in the backgrounder below.

Quotes

“For some time now, we have been employing a number of measures to try to find new and creative ways of both delivering services, as well as attracting physicians to our province and encouraging the ones already here to stay. Initiatives like the ones we are exploring with the College of Physicians and Surgeons are integral to solving these issues and helping ensure the long-term sustainability of our health care system.”

Honourable Tom Osborne

Minister of Health and Community Services

“We appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with the minister and the Department of Health and Community Services. The College is currently reviewing all licensing standards and processes to improve the application process, while ensuring that physicians who are licensed have the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies to provide safe and quality medical care to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.”

Dr. Tanis Adey

Registrar

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Newfoundland and Labrador

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BACKGROUNDER

Recent Measures to Address the Shortage of Health Care Professionals

1. A one-year pilot program to help entice retired family physicians to come back to the workforce.
2. Committed to a suite of measures to expand the supply of health care professionals: creation of new collaborative community team clinics; increase in virtual care services to assist with the provision of urgent care; commitment to further increase the number of graduates from Licensed Practical Nursing Programs by 40 per cent, and Personal Care Attendant Programs by 20 per cent.
3. Two new programs launched to support family doctors in the province and help improve access to primary health care:

1. The New Family Physician Income Guarantee initiative guarantees a minimum income equivalent to that of a salaried family physician to new family doctors who bill on a fee for service basis and open a family practice clinic – or join an established clinic – for the first two years of their practice. This will ease some of the uncertainty associated with the business aspects of opening a clinic by increasing financial certainty. Funding recipients will be required to enter into a two-year return-in-service agreement with government.
2. The Family Practice Start-Up Program will provide \$150,000 to new family practice physicians who open a family practice clinic, or join an existing family practice in the community, and stay in the practice for five years. Recipients who are approved for both programs must sign a five-year return-in-service agreement with government. Additionally, both programs will be linked to establishing a patient roster in the community, as well as the provision of after-hours care. This is the highest incentive offered to family physicians at this time in Atlantic Canada.
4. Initiatives announced in March 2022 to address the challenges facing nurses in the province, including the nursing think tank; Requests for proposals for core staffing review, health human resource plan, workforce research; and an Internationally Educated Nurses Bursary.
5. A new Assistant Deputy Minister for the recruitment and retention office has been hired and the office has been established within the Department of Health and Community Services.
6. An additional five undergraduate seats have been added to the Memorial University's medical School for Newfoundland and Labrador students. Launched the Extraordinary Every Day, a health care campaign aimed at recruiting and retaining health care professionals.
7. Staffing in the regional health authorities has been enhanced to further support recruitment and retention efforts.
8. A number of financial incentives and employee supports have been implemented to help address the immediate nursing workforce challenges and help stabilize the workforce.
9. Compensation rates for covering emergency rooms in smaller rural health centres (category B facilities) have been increased as a temporary measure until October 31, 2022 to help retain existing physicians at these sites, as well as attract other locum physicians during periods of vacancy. As well, in Labrador, Category A rates were increased in the last MOA.

10. \$30,000 to Eastern Health to support students in the Radiation Therapy Program for each of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years. This will double Eastern Health's capacity to support students in the program.