

Topic:	Unified County-Wide Primary Care/Physician Recruitment
Date:	July 30, 2024
Prepared by:	Physician Recruitment Working Group

Briefing Note for the Northumberland County Community Health Committee

ISSUE

Recruitment efforts across Northumberland County are unable to meet the escalating demand for primary care providers. While this is not a unique problem to Northumberland, the response requires a collaborative unified approach, consolidating resources, talents and efforts to improve the recruitment outcomes.

Presently, Northumberland County lacks a unified, County-wide primary care provider recruitment and retention strategy. Instead, three (3) distinct independent committees, each with its own budget and operating in isolation are responsible for attracting talent into the local municipalities:

The West Northumberland Physician Recruitment Committee (WNPRC), Campbellford Memorial Hospital (CMH) and Docs by the Bay who serve the East Region/Trenton and Quinte.

BACKGROUND/SITUATION ANALYSIS

Physician Shortage in Ontario

Ontario is facing a significant physician shortage. Currently 2.5 million Ontarians do not have access to a primary care provider and that number is predicted to grow to more than 4.4 million in the next few years (Ontario College of Family Physicians). By 2025, the Ontario College of Family Physicians reports that 1 in 5 Ontarians may not have access to a family physician. This alarming projection underscores the impending shortage of primary healthcare providers, which will have widespread implications for public health, such as: strain on the existing healthcare infrastructure, leading to increased wait times, overburdened emergency services, and potential declines in preventative care and chronic disease management.

40% of Ontario primary care physicians are reporting plans to retire in the next few years (Ontario Medical Association). To compound that, rural municipalities are losing primary care providers at a rate of 12% per year, four times higher than in urban centres (Rural Ontario Municipal Association). Northumberland County is experiencing significant challenges to fill vacant physician roles and is on the brink of a severe resource crisis.

Unattached Patients in Northumberland County

Currently, there are more than 20 primary care physician vacancies in Northumberland County. The shortage of physicians adversely impacts the health and well-being of residents in Northumberland. Recent statistics indicate that 7% of community members in Northumberland do not have access to a primary care physician today (Inspire); according to forecasts, this number could increase to 20% due to physician retirement and dissatisfied primary care providers leaving practice. This issue necessitates urgent attention and strategic intervention to ensure the healthcare needs of Northumberland County's

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population can be met. As such, improving access to primary care and specialty physician services is a key area of focus for the Ontario Health Team of Northumberland (OHT-N).

RESULT OF COLLECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Problem-Solving Physician Recruitment in Northumberland County

Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) facilitated a Design Thinking event with Northumberland Hills Hospital and OHT-N to co-design a problem-solving framework focused on physician recruitment. They conducted research with many interest holders, partners, including local physicians, and facilitated the first engagement session, inclusive of patient/caregiver representation, in March 2024. The session resulted in a consensus identifying **five (5) key challenges impeding local primary care and specialty physician recruitment and retention:**

1. Lack of a unified, County-wide approach to recruitment;
2. Insufficient strategies for collaboratively marketing the region's unique, amenities and lifestyle benefits;
3. Administrative burden and burnout of doctors;
4. Inadequate housing options and financial incentives; and
5. Necessary measures to ensure providers feel valued, recognized and supported.

During a follow up Design Thinking session with TMU in June 2024, the session concluded with **three (3) priority actions:**

1. Consolidated strategy and unified oversight for primary care and specialty physician recruitment in Northumberland County
2. Articulate a clear value proposition for the collaborative approach
3. Affirming the necessity for OHT-N involvement in this process

Following the TMU Design Thinking sessions, a Physician Recruitment Working Group was formed to advance those priorities, including: Jeff Hohenkerk, President and CEO, Campbellford Memorial Hospital; Susan Walsh, President and CEO, NHH and Co-Lead, OHT-N; Andrea Groff, OHT-N Executive Lead; Chloe Craig, Experience Partner Council member; Dr Erin Pepper, Family Physician; Taryn Rennicks, Executive Director, CHCN and Co-Lead OHT-N, Glenn Dees, Director Health and Human Resources, Northumberland County; and Lynda Kay, Physician Recruiter. This group collaborated on the development of this proposal.

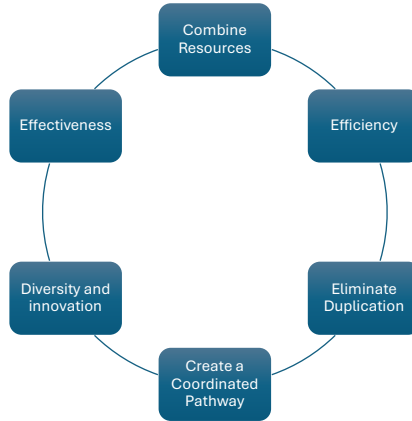
ACTION REQUIRED/RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a Unified County-Wide Physician Recruitment Strategy

To optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of resources for physician recruitment in Northumberland County, a coordinated approach is essential, and will facilitate the sharing of resources and unite the efforts to recruit and retain physicians. This will leverage the successes of existing recruitment efforts and amplify the allocation of resources to attract physician talent to the County.

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Coordinate Recruitment Efforts



To Accomplish This Goal

The Physician Recruitment Working Group is requesting funding for a shared project resource

- 50% County/50% OHT-N

Project Resource:

- Full-time, 6-month contract, up to \$90,000 shared
- Hired through OHT-N’s fund holder, Northumberland Hills Hospital
- Steering Committee (formally Physician Recruitment Working Group) oversight

Deliverables from this investment:

- Create a unified primary care/physician specialist recruitment strategy for Northumberland County
- Coordinate efforts across the County
- Develop key performance indicators
- Establish a single marketing strategy
- Coordinate incentives

NEXT STEPS/CONCLUSION

Physician recruitment for Northumberland County has proven to be challenging and this will only get increasingly difficult as the health and human resource situation becomes more dire. Adopting a coordinated approach will enable Northumberland County to more efficiently and effectively recruit and retain physicians. This united approach will allow county-wide recruitment efforts to pool resources, eliminate redundancies and optimize efforts to attract and retain physician talent into the County. To initiate this process, dedicated coordination effort is required to build the coordinated path forward and more effectively compete with communities outside our region.

About Ontario Health Team of Northumberland

The Ontario Health Team of Northumberland is a County-wide collaboration of patients, caregivers, health, and community care providers, working together to improve patient, caregiver, and provider experience. The goal of the OHT is to build a connected and sustainable health care system, centred around the needs of patients.

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