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Report 2025-146

Report Title: County-Wide Physician Recruitment Pilot: Staff Role, Governance, and Budget Approval

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Council Meeting Date: June 18, 2025

**Report Not Considered by
Standing Committee Because:**

- ☒ Time-sensitive Issue (information received too late for Committee consideration)
- ☐ Urgent Matter (issue arose after this month's Committee meeting)
- ☐ Other

Strategic Plan Priorities: ☒ Innovate for Service Excellence
☒ Ignite Economic Opportunity
☒ Foster a Thriving Community
☒ Propel Sustainable Growth
☒ Champion a Vibrant Future

Recommendation

That County Council having considered Report 2025-146 'County-Wide Physician Recruitment Pilot: Staff Role, Governance, and Budget Approval', approve an annual budget of \$223,000 for the duration of the two-year pilot program, inclusive of salary, benefits, travel, business development expenses, and performance bonuses; and

Further That County Council authorize a policy exception to permit this outcomes-based bonus structure, applicable exclusively to a Physician Engagement Specialist role; and

Further That County Council direct that the one-time contribution of \$40,000 previously approved under Resolution 2024-09-18-615 be allocated as follows:

- \$20,000 to be used for the development of a marketing and promotional campaign;
- \$20,000 to be held in the County General Reserve as contingency funding; and

Further That County Council approve that the two-year pilot program be funded first from any available in-year operating surpluses, and second from the County General Reserve as needed in 2025 and included in the 2026 and 2027 budget; and

Further That County Council approve the proposed Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee composition, including representatives from the Ontario Health Team of Northumberland, local municipalities, the business sector, and County staff as outlined in the staff report; and

Further That County Council direct staff to proceed with stakeholder outreach for nominations and to draft a Terms of Reference for presentation at the inaugural meeting.”

Purpose

The purpose of the report is to provide considerations and obtain approvals from Council for a two-year Physician Engagement Specialist outcomes-based compensation package, composition of a Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee, and an initial budget for commencement of a physician recruitment pilot action plan.

Background

At the Council meeting on May 21, 2025, Council approved Resolution Number 2025-05-21-412 noting that ‘it is recommended widely among key stakeholders across the County for the need for a centralized effort for physician recruitment efforts’ and provided action to staff as follows:

- *“That County Council, having considered the verbal discussion regarding ‘Physician Recruitment in Northumberland County’, direct staff to engage a physician recruiter to be retained on an outcomes-based contract for no more than 2 years, noting that the recruiter would be specific for primary care / family physicians; and*
- *Further that County Council hereby authorize the creation of a Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee and direct staff to report back at a future Committee / Council meeting with recommendations regarding the committee composition and Terms of Reference.”*

At the Council meeting on September 18, 2024, Council approved Resolution Number 2024-09-18-615:

- *“That County Council support the creation of a Northumberland Wide Physician Recruitment Plan; and*
- *Further that County Council support action items for physician recruitment; and*
- *Further that County Council endorse a regionally representative governance model for physician recruitment; and*
- *Further that County Council approve a one-time contribution of \$40,000 to fund the following items:*

- *\$20,000 earmarked for the creation of a marketing promotional campaign that includes video and social media assets that can be used for physician recruitment as well as the general promotion of Northumberland County; and*
- *\$20,000 earmarked for the creation of a pilot project to review physician recruitment and that would include the expansion of recruitment efforts.”*

The Ontario Medical Association estimates that 2.5 million people are without a family doctor, with the expectation that this number will double in the next two years. Currently, an estimated 8,000 Northumberland residents currently lack a primary care provider, with this projected to rise to 20,000 by 2026.

Historically, physician recruitment efforts in Northumberland have been carried out through three separate and distinct programs:

1. West Northumberland Physician Recruitment, serving Cobourg, Port Hope, Hamilton Township, Alnwick/Haldimand, and Cramahe;
2. The Trent Hills Physician Recruitment and Retention Committee; and
3. Docs by the Bay, which supports Brighton and the City of Quinte West.

Council has provided clear direction for the implementation of a two-year pilot county-wide program for physician recruitment and retention activities to be facilitated at the County inclusive of a dedicated recruitment role and oversight via a Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee.

The need for expansion of primary health care services in Northumberland is recognized by many stakeholders with the rapidly accelerating shortage of physicians. This is not a unique challenge to Northumberland. Globally, there is a significant and growing shortage of physicians. A multi-dimensional crisis driven by demographic, educational, and systemic factors such as:

- an aging demographic
- increased chronic disease burden
- demand for complex care
- physician retirement
- physician burnout
- limited medical education capacity
- credential barriers
- administrative/regulatory burden
- urban centric resource allocation

Consultations

Consultations were held with the Eastern Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance to assess industry norms inclusive recruitment roles and typical compensation packages, physician recruitment best practices and challenges.

Discussions were held with the Human Resources Department who canvassed feedback from municipalities on physician recruiter roles and compensation.

Engagement with representatives from the Community Health Centre of Northumberland and Ontario Health Team Northumberland (OHTN) was undertaken to gather input on composition of the Physician Recruitment Committee.

Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations

While the creation of a Physician Engagement Specialist position and the establishment of a Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee present proactive steps toward addressing Northumberland's physician shortage, several risks must be acknowledged and managed to ensure successful outcomes:

1. Competitive Physician Recruitment Landscape

- **Risk:** Northumberland County is competing with municipalities across Ontario and Canada that offer aggressive recruitment packages, including financial incentives, housing supports, and professional opportunities.
- **Mitigation:** By offering a dedicated staff resource, coordinated marketing, a regionally representative governance model, and potential financial incentives, the County strengthens its position to attract physicians in a competitive market.

2. Delayed or Limited Recruitment Outcomes

- **Risk:** Recruitment timelines are unpredictable, and outcomes may be slower than anticipated despite strategic efforts, particularly given the limited number of family medicine graduates.
- **Mitigation:** The proposed performance-based bonus model ties financial incentives to measurable success, encouraging results-driven engagement. Continued collaboration with local physicians, medical schools, and Ontario Health partners will help expand reach and align with evolving trends in workforce availability.

3. Budget Overruns

- **Risk:** Expenses, including recruitment-related travel, bonuses, or promotional campaigns, may exceed original estimates.
- **Mitigation:** Strong financial oversight, regular reporting to the Advisory Committee and Council, and performance monitoring will help ensure expenditures remain aligned with budget projections.

4. Community Expectations

- **Risk:** Public and municipal expectations for rapid improvements in physician access may not align with the time required to secure long-term physician commitments.
- **Mitigation:** Transparent communication, regular progress updates, and engagement with member municipalities will help manage expectations and highlight ongoing efforts and successes.

5. Dependence on a Single Position

- **Risk:** The success of recruitment efforts may be disproportionately reliant on the performance and retention of the Physician Engagement Specialist.

- **Mitigation:** The establishment of a Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee provides broader leadership, governance, and accountability to ensure continuity, shared responsibility, and collective ownership of outcomes.

6. Regulatory or Policy Barriers

- **Risk:** Provincial or federal regulations related to physician licensing, scope of practice, or immigration may impact recruitment options.
- **Mitigation:** Ongoing partnership with Ontario Health, regulatory colleges, and health workforce planning bodies will help identify and respond to policy changes.

Discussion / Options

This report outlines the initial steps towards strengthening Northumberland County's primary care system with:

1. The hiring of a 2-year contract Physician Engagement Specialist at the County, and
2. The formation of a Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee.

Together, these initiatives support the County's direction for improving access to equitable, sustainable primary care by fostering collaboration and coordination across municipal and healthcare sectors through a county-wide lens.

1. Physician Engagement Specialist

To address the persistent shortage of family physicians in Northumberland, County Council directed staff to engage a physician recruiter to be retained on an outcomes-based contract for no more than 2 years. To this end, staff have posted a job for a Physician Engagement Specialist. This full-time 2-year contract position will lead and facilitate the design and execution of strategic initiatives focused on physician recruitment, retention, and engagement—specifically within the primary care/family medicine sector.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Strategic Development:** Design, implement and execute a physician recruitment and retention framework and action plan tailored to local needs and challenges.
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Coordinate with internal County departments, member municipalities, local hospitals, Ontario Health Team Northumberland, Community Health Centre Northumberland, Family Health Teams, local physician groups and other sector stakeholders.
- **Community Integration:** Support physicians and their families in relocating and integrating into the Northumberland community—emphasizing a wholesome, lifestyle-oriented recruitment approach.
- **Practice Environment Support:** Promote supportive clinical environments and community ties to improve physician satisfaction and long-term retention.
- **System Alignment:** Ensure recruitment efforts align with health system planning and regional health service capacity.
- **Grassroots Engagement:** Actively work with local family physicians, leverage personal and professional community networks, and apply creative approaches—recognized as critical ingredients in successful physician recruitment efforts.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased attraction of qualified family physicians to Northumberland.
- Improved physician retention and satisfaction.
- Strengthened health equity and access to care across the County's communities.

Compensation Structure for the Physician Engagement Specialist

The position of Physician Engagement Specialist has been publicly posted with an accompanying note that the compensation package is under review. In alignment with Council's prior direction to establish an outcomes-based contract, staff are proposing a compensation model that combines a competitive base salary with a performance-based bonus component.

Proposed Salary Range

Following a job evaluation conducted by the Human Resources Department, the position is recommended to be placed within a salary range of \$100,000 to \$110,000 annually. This range is consistent with comparable roles in the healthcare and municipal sectors and reflects the specialized nature and strategic responsibilities of the position.

Performance-Based Bonus Structure

To incentivize and reward successful recruitment outcomes, staff are further recommending a performance bonus structure as follows:

- A \$5,000 bonus would be paid for each physician successfully recruited, conditional upon the physician completing one full year of active service in Northumberland County.
- Given that the Physician Engagement Specialist position is a two-year contract, any earned bonuses would be paid out regardless of the contract term, including situations where the employee leaves the role before the end of the contract.
- This approach ensures alignment between performance outcomes and tangible progress toward the County's strategic goal of enhancing access to primary care.

Policy Considerations

It is important to note that the County's existing Compensation Policy does not currently allow for bonus payments. As such, Council approval will be required to authorize this proposed bonus structure exclusively for this position, in recognition of the unique, performance-driven nature of the role and the measurable impact physician recruitment has on community health and service access.

2. Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee

To provide governance, strategic oversight, and stakeholder engagement, Council has directed the establishment of a Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee. This committee will include representation from key sectors such as local municipalities, healthcare organizations, primary care providers, community representatives, and the Physician Engagement Specialist.

Mandate:

- Offer guidance and support on physician recruitment strategies and initiatives.
- Facilitate regional alignment and coordination.
- Act as a forum for collaboration and shared accountability.
- Ensure local and timely data are available to support evidence-based decisions regarding physician recruitment and retention.

Benefits and Anticipated Outcomes:

- **Physician-Driven Input:** Engaging directly with local physicians ensures County initiatives reflect the real-time needs and interests of practicing physicians and medical residents. Since physicians often serve as informal recruiters on behalf of their communities, working with them reinforces responsiveness to their recommendations and demonstrates mutual accountability.
- **Transparency and Oversight:** Ensures accountability and alignment with community health priorities.
- **Collaborative Leadership:** Builds collective ownership and fosters multi-sector engagement in addressing physician shortages.
- **Strategic Alignment:** Ensures local recruitment efforts are harmonized with broader regional and provincial health system initiatives.
- **Informed Decision-Making:** Draws on sector expertise and local insight to guide policy and operational decisions.
- **Stronger Community Voice:** Incorporates resident and stakeholder perspectives to shape inclusive, community-driven strategies.

Committee Composition – Option for Council Consideration:

To ensure diverse, informed, and regionally balanced input, staff are suggesting that the Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee be composed of **14 members** representing key stakeholder groups across Northumberland County. The following draft structure is submitted for Council's consideration, discussion and potential revisions:

- **Ontario Health Team of Northumberland (OHTN) Representation:**
 - **2 members** from the OHTN Collaboration Council
 - **2 physician members** from the OHTN Primary Care Network

Representation would be based on recommendations from the respective groups. These representatives would bring front-line health system expertise and ensure integration with broader primary care strategies.

- **Geographic Representation:**
Efforts should be made to ensure the four OHTN representatives (Collaboration Council and Primary Care Network) reflect a balanced geographic distribution across West, East, and North Northumberland, to capture the unique health access challenges and opportunities in each area.
- **Municipal Representation:**
 - **1 member** from each of the **seven (7)** member municipalities (Alnwick/Haldimand, Brighton, Cobourg, Cramahe, Hamilton Township, Port Hope, and Trent Hills), appointed by the respective municipal council

- These appointees may be either a local councillor or a community member at large, at the discretion of the municipality
- To ensure compliance with the Municipal Act and to avoid creating a quorum of County Council within the committee, no more than **three (3)** County Councillors may be appointed to the committee
- **Business Stakeholder Representation:**
 - **2 members** representing the local business sector, nominated through business associations or networks
 - Their inclusion will ensure the perspective of employers and the economic development community is considered, especially in highlighting physician recruitment as a factor in workforce attraction and retention
- **County Administration:**
 - **1 member:** the Physician Engagement Specialist (non-voting or voting, as determined by the Terms of Reference)
 - This role will serve as the operational lead and liaison for implementation of committee recommendations and ongoing coordination

This proposed structure provides a **total of 14 members** and ensures comprehensive representation across healthcare, municipal leadership, economic stakeholders, and administrative implementation.

Next Steps in the Establishment of the Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee:

With Council's endorsement of the proposed composition and mandate of the Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee, the following next steps are recommended to guide the formal establishment and launch of the committee:

1. Membership Recruitment and Confirmation

- **Outreach to Stakeholder Groups:** Invitations will be extended to the OHTN Collaboration Council and Primary Care Network to nominate four members, with attention to geographic representation.
- **Municipal Appointments:** Each of the seven member municipalities will be formally requested to nominate a representative, either a municipal councillor or a community member at large, ensuring adherence to the three-councillor maximum.
- **Business Sector Engagement:** County staff will collaborate with local chambers of commerce, business networks, and economic development partners to identify and recommend two representatives from the business community.
- **Administrative Role:** The Physician Engagement Specialist will serve on the committee and act as lead coordinator for scheduling, communications, and follow-up.

2. Development of Terms of Reference

County staff will draft a high-level Terms of Reference for review and approval at the committee's inaugural meeting. The draft will outline:

- Committee purpose and scope
- Roles and responsibilities of members

- Reporting structure (to County Council)
- Meeting frequency and quorum requirements
- Decision-making and consensus protocols
- Conflict of interest provisions
- Term length and renewal process

3. Initial Meeting and Agenda

An inaugural meeting of the committee will be convened following full membership confirmation. A proposed initial meeting agenda may include:

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Overview of County Physician Recruitment Strategy
3. Presentation of Draft Terms of Reference
4. Review and Feedback on Committee Mandate and Role
5. Establishment of Operating Norms and Meeting Schedule
6. Preliminary Discussion on Priority Areas and Data Needs
7. Roundtable: Local Experiences, Challenges, and Opportunities
8. Next Steps and Action Items

Financial Impact

To support the implementation of the physician recruitment and retention strategy, the following annual budget requirements are identified for the Physician Engagement Specialist position and associated program delivery costs.

1. Base Salary and Benefits

- The proposed base salary range for the Physician Engagement Specialist is \$100,000 to \$110,000, reflecting both the strategic scope of the role and alignment with comparable industry standards.
- Based on the County's payroll structure, an additional 30% is estimated to cover employer-paid benefits and statutory costs, including pension, CPP, EI, and health benefits.
 - Estimated total compensation cost (salary + benefits): Approximately \$130,000 to \$143,000 annually.

2. Travel, Business Development, and Hospitality Expenses

- To enable physician engagement and relationship-building efforts—including travel, community visits, outreach campaigns, stakeholder meetings, and candidate hosting—an estimated \$30,000 annually is recommended.
 - These funds will ensure that the Physician Engagement Specialist can be active, visible, and responsive in a highly competitive physician recruitment environment.

3. Performance-Based Bonuses

- A \$5,000 bonus is proposed for each physician successfully recruited, to be paid once the physician has completed one full year of service in Northumberland County.

- To support this approach, an annual bonus pool of \$25,000 to \$50,000 is recommended, depending on recruitment outcomes.
- Bonuses would remain payable even if the employee contract concludes prior to the end of the two-year term.

4. Council-Approved One-Time Contribution

At its meeting on September 18, 2024, Council passed Resolution Number 2024-09-18-615, which approved a one-time investment of \$40,000 to advance physician recruitment efforts:

- \$20,000 was earmarked for the creation of a marketing and promotional campaign, including video and social media content to promote both physician recruitment and Northumberland County more broadly.
- \$20,000 was allocated to support a pilot initiative to expand physician recruitment activities, laying the groundwork for this broader recruitment plan.

An estimate of the upper-range annual budget is provided below:

<u>Estimated Annual Budget</u>	
	Estimated Cost
Base Salary	\$110,000
Benefits & Payroll Burden (30%)	\$33,000
Travel and Business Expenses	\$30,000
Performance Bonuses	\$50,000
Total Estimated Annual Budget	\$223,000

The previously approved one-time contributions have not been utilized and are available to provide financing for the 2-year pilot. The \$20,000 for the creation of a marketing and promotional campaign would be utilized for its intended purpose. The \$20,000 to support a pilot initiative is still available and it is being proposed that this be maintained in the County General Reserve as a contingency given the uncertainty to the extent that performance bonuses would be paid and for any unforeseen expenditures.

Staff are proposing that the financing during the 2-year pilot be sourced firstly by any available in-year surpluses to the extent available and to the extent required and secondly by the County General Reserve for 2025. The physician recruitment budget will be included in the 2026 and 2027 budgets (2027 pro-rated to complete the two-year pilot unless an extension is approved).

The budget as proposed does not contemplate any incentives to be paid to physicians that are successfully recruited. The Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee will provide recommendations on any possible physician incentives and potential sources of financing inclusive of community partnerships under a recruitment strategy plan.

Member Municipality Impacts

Northumberland County's physician recruitment and retention strategy is being developed and implemented as a coordinated, county-wide initiative that delivers measurable benefits across all seven member municipalities. Through the creation of a Physician Engagement Specialist

position and the launch of a Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee, the County is taking proactive and collaborative steps to address the county-wide physician shortage.

Reliable access to family physicians is not only a health issue—it is also a key economic development factor. This is particularly relevant given the potential for significant development tied to the proposed nuclear energy project in Wesleyville. It is vital that Northumberland's physician recruitment efforts align with projected population growth and ensure that primary care access expands accordingly. Failure to meet these service needs could impact workforce attraction, local housing market sustainability, and community confidence.

Conclusion / Outcomes

Northumberland County is taking bold and strategic action to address the growing gap in access to primary care by advancing a coordinated, county-wide approach to physician recruitment, retention, and engagement. The hiring of a dedicated Physician Engagement Specialist, combined with the establishment of a Physician Recruitment Advisory Committee, represents a significant step forward in building a sustainable and equitable health workforce that meets the needs of all member municipalities.

These efforts are rooted in a collaborative governance model, strong partnerships with local physicians and Ontario Health Team representatives, and a commitment to evidence-based, community-informed decision-making. The proposed recruitment structure reflects the complexity of today's physician landscape, emphasizing not only the needs of physicians but also their families, professional environments, and integration into the fabric of Northumberland's communities.

Attachments

N/A