

Backgrounder: A Family Doctor for You

Overview

Ontario's healthcare system is in a dire crisis.

Ontario currently has 4.1 million people who are not signed up with their own family doctor. That represents almost one in four people in this province.

Almost 2,400 family physicians, serving about three million people, are on the verge of retirement in the next five years. Without any urgent action, soon, over seven million people – almost half the province – may not have access to a family doctor.

Over 200 Ontario municipalities do not have a single rostering family doctor. Of those who do have a family doctor, almost a million people travel more than 50 km for their family doctor appointments. About 150,000 people travel over 200 km to see their family doctor.

The Ministry of Health's own data shows that Doug Ford has been responsible for the worst health care-system performance in our province's history. Ontario had 1,200 emergency room closures last year and the number of people experiencing hallway healthcare has doubled since 2018.

On top of this, the number of patients without a family doctor increased by one million since Doug Ford became Premier. With an aging population and so many people disconnected from primary care, there is a growing risk that many acute and chronic conditions aren't being diagnosed or treated in a timely manner. In Ontario,

- About 300,000 new cases of heart disease are diagnosed each year.
- Over one million people report experiencing mental health or addiction issues annually.
- About 1.3 million people have diabetes.
- About two million people live with chronic respiratory diseases.
- 75% of deaths every year are a result of chronic diseases like diabetes or heart disease.

A secure and stable relationship with a family doctor is essential for lowering the personal, social, and financial burden of chronic diseases, and achieving personal wellbeing.

Solution

Team Bonnie commits to delivering a comprehensive, reliable, and resilient universal public health care system; and ensuring access to a family doctor for everyone is a foundational block of that vision.

Team Bonnie guarantees a family doctor for YOU within FOUR years. We will invest \$3.1 billion to attract, recruit, retain, and integrate 3,100 family doctors by 2029, ensuring every person in Ontario has access to the care they deserve.

We will break down barriers so every qualified and capable doctor can work and be retained in the profession. By advancing team-based care and expanding the use of technology, Team Bonnie will free doctors to focus on what matters most—supporting patients, not drowning in

paperwork. Inspired by the proven success of Norway's team-based care system, Team Bonnie will:

- Create two new medical schools and expand capacities in existing medical schools, doubling the number of medical school spots and residency positions.
- Deliver team-based care with evening and weekend support, integrated home care for seniors, and accessible mental health services for children, youth, and teenagers.
- Accelerate the process to integrate at least 1,200 qualified and experienced internationally trained doctors over four years through the [Practice Ready Ontario](#) program to first match and then exceed the capacity of similar programs implemented in other provinces like Alberta and British Columbia.
- Eliminate fax machines, enhance virtual care, introduce centralized referral systems with patient portals, and implement interoperable electronic medical records to let doctors and other healthcare professionals in the circle of care focus on patients instead of paperwork.
- Incentivize family doctors to serve in rural and northern communities, and mentor the next generation to prevent future shortages.

Details

Training new doctors and retaining existing ones

Ontario currently has the second lowest number of medical school seats on a per capita basis in the whole country. Despite having 39% of the population in Canada, Ontario has only 33% of the medical school spots. Team Bonnie will:

- Create two new medical schools and expand capacities in existing ones. By doing so, this will double the number of training positions by adding an additional 1,300 undergraduate medical school seats, with seventy percent of these created in existing medical schools.
 - This radical expansion and transformation of medical training will allow Ontario to move from being the province with the second-lowest number of medical seats in Canada to being the province with the second-highest on a per capita basis.
- Double the number of available residency positions by adding an additional 1,625 residency positions, two-thirds of which will be dedicated to family medicine.
- Retain family doctors who have left comprehensive family medicine or are nearing retirement by investing \$250 million over four years in targeted retention efforts. To do this, we will:
 - Recruit at least 650 of the 6,000 qualified family doctors currently working in other medical fields by offering financial and administrative incentives to bring them back to deliver comprehensive family medical care.
 - Incentivize about 2,400 family doctors nearing or past retirement age to delay retirement and continue serving, ensuring at least half remain with their patients for another four years.

Delivering team-based care

Team Bonnie will:

- Structure all new primary care clinics under a team-based delivery model, such as Community Health Centres or Family Health Teams, to ensure:
 - Seamless access to care, including on weekends and in the evenings, reducing dependence on emergency departments.
 - Enhanced access to mental health support, particularly for children and youth.
 - Integration with home care providers to improve access for seniors.
- Mandate Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) to provide regional leadership on primary care by:
 - Expanding Primary Care Networks of existing family doctors.
 - Creating new team-based family medical care groups at a pace of at least two teams per year in each OHT region with minimum mandated complements of family doctors, Nurse Practitioners, Registered Nurses, social workers, Care Navigators, and administrative staff.
 - Providing interim primary care services for unattached patients through initiatives such as integrated minor injury units.
- Expand public funding for primary care services delivered by Nurse Practitioners.
- Approve every request to expand primary care teams rejected by Doug Ford's government in 2023, estimated to be several hundred Expressions of Interest that met criteria and were ready for execution but still not funded.

Keeping doctors focused on patients instead of paperwork

Currently, family doctors in Ontario spend almost 19 hours a week doing paperwork. This is valuable time that could be better spent serving patients instead of filling out forms. Team Bonnie will:

- Introduce a centralized digital referral service enabling physicians to submit a single consultation request while allowing patients to access a portal to participate in the referral process. Patients will be able to select their specialist provider based on factors such as physician, hospital, city, or wait time. This approach, similar to the UK system, offers not just efficiency but also the choice patients deserve.
- Eliminate the use of fax machines and transition to using interoperable medical systems for physicians, hospitals, pharmacists, and allied health providers so that medical records can be shared with everyone inside the patients' circle of care.
- Expand the use of AI and enhance virtual appointments to provide both doctors and patients with convenience and ease of access.
- Stop the practice of negation. Under the current system, physicians are being charged if their patients go to walk-in clinics and patients are being punished by being sent to

hospital emergency rooms or are being de-rostered by their doctors altogether. Team Bonnie will end this injustice by stopping the practice of charging doctors (commonly known as “negation”), and instead empower them to have more appointments available by reducing administrative burden and delivering team-based primary care.

Accelerating integration of international medical graduates

Ontario’s Liberals laid the foundation for the Practice Ready Ontario program to accelerate accreditation for internationally trained doctors. Doug Ford delayed implementation by nearly five years. When finally introduced, he lacked the vision and ambition to quickly assess almost 10,000 international medical graduates and integrate qualified internationally trained doctors into the health care system. Team Bonnie will:

- Accelerate the process to integrate at least 1,200 qualified and experienced internationally trained doctors over four years through the [Practice Ready Ontario](#) program.
 - Currently capped at just 50 spots, this program lags behind Alberta and British Columbia, which each offer 100 spots annually despite having a third of Ontario’s population.
 - Team Bonnie will immediately double that number to 100 spots and increase the available number of positions by 80% annually for each of the following three years.
 - To incentivize currently active and practicing family doctors to participate in this program as evaluators, Team Bonnie will invest \$30 million over four years.

For context, the Practice Ready Assessment program was introduced through a pan-Canadian framework adopted by the Medical Council of Canada to accelerate the integration of internationally trained medical graduates, particularly in family medicine. Internationally trained doctors with four years of practical experience abroad who pass the MCCQE, NAC Exam, and TDM Exam can apply to participate in this program. Accepted participants then undergo a 12-week intensive field assessment supervised by an Ontario family doctor, followed by writing the Certification Exam in Family Medicine. Upon completion, they serve in rural or northern communities (with a [Rurality Index](#) of 40 or above) for three years.