

Subject: Physician Recruitment Update

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Recommendations

1. That Report ED 3-2025 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- This report provides the Planning and Economic Development Committee with an update on the Niagara Physician Recruitment Program and its planned initiatives for the first and second quarters of 2025.
- In November 2024, the Niagara Physician Recruitment Program transitioned from Public Health to Economic Development. This transition has provided enhanced support from the Economic Development department, particularly through collaboration with the Manager of Strategic Marketing. This partnership has strengthened marketing efforts directed at physicians, ensuring a more targeted and effective outreach strategy. Additionally, it has facilitated the creation of marketing materials and promotional initiatives designed to attract and retain medical professionals in Niagara. The program collaborates with each municipality and clinic lead to recruit and retain physicians in Niagara, ensuring an integrated approach to addressing the region's healthcare needs.
- As directed by Regional Council, Niagara Region facilitated a Physician Recruitment Roundtable event held on November 26, 2024. The event brought together Chief Administrative Officers and Mayors from each Niagara municipality, along with economic development representatives, post-secondary institutions, and health sector partners. This demonstrated a strong regional approach to physician recruitment and emphasized the shared commitment to addressing the primary care shortage.

Financial Considerations

The activities described in this report have been accommodated within the Council approved 2025 Economic Development operating budget.

Analysis

Niagara welcomed twenty-six new physicians in 2024, marking a record year for recruitment. An additional seven physicians are set to start in the first and second quarters of 2025.

Currently, thirty-one physicians are accepting new patients, the highest number ever listed on the [Niagara Region's Find a Doctor portal](https://www.niagararegion.ca/health/find-a-doctor.aspx) (<https://www.niagararegion.ca/health/find-a-doctor.aspx>). While 2024 was the most successful year on record for physician recruitment, Niagara's growing population continues to drive increasing healthcare demands.

The shortage of primary care physicians continues to impact community health and well-being across Niagara. Without a family physician, many residents rely on walk-in clinics and emergency departments for primary care, placing additional strain on the healthcare system. Physician attraction and retention remain critical priorities for municipalities to ensure residents have access to essential healthcare services.

The Physician Recruitment Specialist provides resources and services for physicians exploring practice opportunities in Niagara. The program implements a global recruitment strategy to position Niagara as a destination for medical professionals. Collaboration with developers, pharmacies, and clinics ensures that practice opportunities, including full-time positions and temporary coverage, are effectively promoted.

The recruitment process is a long-term engagement, with physician candidates often requiring two to three years of support. This includes guidance through the licensing process, immigration to Ontario, and access to local resources to assist in their transition to practice in Niagara. While this represents a significant milestone in physician recruitment, succession planning remains a priority, as approximately fourteen percent of the current physician workforce is over the age of sixty-five.

Strategic Recommendations from the Municipal Roundtable

Staff have received the report from RedBrick Communications and are reviewing the recommendations to ensure alignment with regional priorities, particularly in addressing physician shortages and strengthening recruitment efforts. The focus remains on

enhancing collaboration across municipalities, healthcare partners, and key stakeholders to develop a coordinated approach that attracts and retains medical professionals in Niagara. The Chair's office will be sharing further details in a report to all of Council.

International Opportunities

Changes to licensing requirements by the Medical Council of Canada in April 2023 have streamlined the process for internationally trained physicians to practice in Canada, eliminating the MCCQE1 exam requirement. More details on recognized training and certification can be found on the [College of Family Physicians of Canada website](https://www.cfpc.ca/en/education-professional-development/examinations-and-certification/alternative-pathways-to-certification-in-family-me/recognized-training-in-certification-outside-canad) (<https://www.cfpc.ca/en/education-professional-development/examinations-and-certification/alternative-pathways-to-certification-in-family-me/recognized-training-in-certification-outside-canad>).

The Physician Recruitment Specialist continues to prioritize international recruitment efforts, particularly targeting Canadian-trained physicians studying abroad in the United Kingdom, United States, Ireland, and Australia.

Key recruitment events in 2024 included:

Career MD Fair (Boston, February 2024): Engaged with specialists, including Canadian-trained doctors, to raise awareness of physician opportunities in Niagara.

Birmingham Career Fair (United Kingdom, June 2024): Connected with over 70 family physicians interested in relocating to Ontario. In 2024, 62% of Niagara's new physicians came from the U.K.

AAFP National Conference (Kansas City, August 2024): Engaged with students and residents from 175 U.S. medical schools, many of whom were Canadian and interested in returning home.

Repatriation Expo (Ireland, October 2024): Hosted by the Canadian Society of Physician Recruitment (CASPR) in partnership with Atlantic Bridge, this event connected over 150 students with recruitment programs and Canadian health authorities. The event facilitated discussions on elective placements, summer jobs, and pathways for returning to Canada. As Chair of CASPR, the Physician Recruitment Specialist was actively involved in planning and execution, alongside representatives from the Town of Fort Erie.

With many Canadian students training abroad, efforts continue to strengthen ties with Canadian medical learners in international schools, including 17 in Canada, 6 in Ireland, 33 in the United Kingdom, 50 in the Caribbean, 21 in Australia, and 175 in the United States. The goal remains to connect these future physicians with opportunities in Niagara and provide resources to facilitate their return. Changes to licensing requirements for internationally trained physicians in April 2023 have simplified the process for Canadian-trained physicians abroad to return home. This has enabled targeted recruitment efforts in key international markets, particularly in the United Kingdom, United States, Ireland, and Australia.

Strategic Partnerships and Memberships

The Southern Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance (SOPRA) was founded in September 2023 to address the growing demand for internationally trained physicians and now includes eighteen recruitment programs across Ontario Health West. In April 2024, the Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance (OPRA) was established as a broader initiative to further coordinate recruitment efforts across the province. This alliance collaborates to develop a shared international marketing strategy, database tracking for international candidates, and a streamlined local pool. The joint effort enhances Niagara's ability to attract and integrate physicians.

Event Plan for 2025

The success of the program in 2024 will continue to build momentum from past years engagement activities. The event plan for 2025 can be seen on Appendix A.

Alternatives Reviewed

There are no alternatives to review.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The Physician Recruitment and Retention Program aligns with Niagara Region's 2023-2026 Council Strategic Priorities across multiple pillars. By enhancing regional coordination and supporting a skilled healthcare workforce, the program contributes to sustainable service delivery (Effective Region). It also promotes inclusivity by improving access to healthcare for all residents (Equitable Region) and strengthens economic stability by attracting physicians to Niagara (Prosperous Region). These efforts collectively support the Region's vision of "Modern communities growing better together."

Other Pertinent Reports

There are no other pertinent reports.

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Appendices

Appendix A 2025 Event and Engagement Plan