

BACKGROUND

Enhanced Access to Emergency Rooms and Collaborative Emergency Centres

In PEI, hardly a week goes by without an announcement of ER overcrowding or the latest CEC closure. Staffing is consistently cited as the issue.

At the same time, both a cause and a symptom of our healthcare crisis in Islanders seeking to access a family doctor, is the fact that our ERs and CECs are being used as substitutes for walk-in clinics.

Increased traffic in these sites adds to line-ups, frustration and the overall dysfunction of the health system. The extent of overcrowding at the QEH, for example, means that as many as 40% of Islanders who show up leave in frustration before they are seen.

In short, to fix PEI's ER problem, we must fix broader health system problems.

First, we need to expand primary care options for non-urgent patients so ERs are not viewed as out-patient clinics. These primary care settings need not be exclusively doctors' offices. They can - and should be - pharmacies, for example. To this end, PEI has merely begun to scratch the surface of the role pharmacists can play.

At the same time, in the short term, we need added access to physicians through expanded walk-in clinics and virtual care if we are going to begin to address ER overcrowding.

Second, there are broader systemic problems around the lack of seniors' access to long-term care, restorative care, and other services which allow them to leave hospitals sooner, freeing up acute care beds needed for ER patients admitted to hospital. In the absence of such beds, ER patients end up occupying ER observation rooms (or hallways), resulting in bottlenecks that contribute to excessive wait times.

At the same time, our paramedics crowd our hospitals' ER hallways, spending excessive time waiting for their patients to be seen, resulting in chronic shortages of paramedics able to respond to calls.

Thirdly, we must make the best possible use of our health human resources supporting emergency medicine, including looking at what new healthcare professionals can be leveraged to support access to care.

There is no easy fix to improving access to emergency medicine. That's why the Liberals are looking at the issues and challenges from a systemic perspective to address the crisis and propose an eight-point plan under our Healthcare First platform.

HEALTHCARE *first*


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