

BACKGROUND

Expanded Access to Physicians in a Renewed Healthcare System

PEI faces a crisis in terms of the access that Islanders have to a physician. Access to a family doctor is critically important as they are a gateway to the health system. Without access to a family doctor, over thirty thousand Islanders struggle to get the healthcare they need and deserve. A 2022 report by the Canadian Institute of Health Information found that PEI had the lowest number of family doctors per 100,000 population in Atlantic Canada and ranked among the lowest in Canada.

The problem was not always this extreme. When the King Government came to power, there were 7,000 Islanders on the patient registry. Less than four years later, that number has swelled to 32,000—an increase of over 350%. Island doctors are working tirelessly in the face of ever-worsening numbers as many existing doctors are reaching the age of retirement. While the proposed medical school may eventually help address shortages, we are six years away from producing practicing physicians. ***We simply can't wait that long.***

When it comes to Islanders accessing a physician, the King Government has failed to act with the sense of urgency the crisis requires. Instead, King has taken to convincing Islanders of why it is unreasonable for them to expect to have a family doctor.

The Liberal Party's Healthcare First platform will work directly to improve access to a doctor for Islanders and will:

1. **Engage with the PEI Medical Society** to undertake health human resource planning to identify physician supply and demand and to guide recruitment and retention planning;
2. **Expand opportunities for virtual care** through Maple and other telemedicine/virtual-type initiatives;
3. **Adjust fee structure/compensation models**, so that family medicine becomes a more attractive choice;
4. **Expand the volume of walk-in clinics** on an interim basis by incentivizing physicians to provide these services;

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5. **Double scholarships/financial incentives/return in service grants** to ensure Island students studying medicine in other provinces will find it attractive to return to PEI to practice;
6. **Establish return-in-service agreements for Island students** studying at a Canadian University where the PEI government has purchased seats and double the number of medical residency seats, including four new seats for students studying outside of Canada.
7. Work with the PEI Medical Society, UPEI, and Holland College to develop a **digital medical specialist program** to help physicians with support to better manage administrative backlogs and inefficiencies; and
8. **Ensure Master Agreement Negotiations** use the results of health human resource supply and demand analysis to guide compensation decision-making in order to attract doctors in specialty areas where the greatest vacancies exist;

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