

Stronger. Together.

Doctors Nova Scotia's Election 2021 Priorities

Doctors Nova Scotia (DNS) is the collective voice of physicians in Nova Scotia. Its membership comprises more than 3,500 physicians, including practising and retired physicians, medical students and residents.

On behalf of the province's doctors, the association is committed to working with all partners in health-care delivery to ensure Nova Scotia is positioned to recruit and retain talented and skilled doctors, introduce new and innovative ways to deliver health care, and to continuously look for ways to improve patient care and access.

Election 2021 provides an opportunity for Nova Scotians, health-care providers and patients to share their priorities for a healthy, thriving Nova Scotia health-care system. On behalf of physicians, DNS is sharing its election priorities.

LEARNING FROM THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

Nova Scotia has led the country with a strong COVID-19 response for the past 16 months. The provincial government and all health-system partners have worked together to leverage new opportunities and solutions to deliver care to Nova Scotians. Now, we have an opportunity to harness this momentum and use the strength and agility that brought us through the pandemic to help our health system recover. We need to take that systems approach and the lessons we learned during the COVID-19 pandemic to build a better system.

Nova Scotia has about 3,600 physicians, 15,000 nurses and many more



allied health-care providers who all have lessons to share from their COVID-19 experiences. The system should take the time it needs to mine those ideas and put them to work.

RECRUITING AND RETAINING MORE DOCTORS IN OUR PROVINCE

Recruiting and retaining physician talent to Nova Scotia must continue to be a top priority. We continue to have challenges in both rural and urban areas of the province, and across many different physician specialties. We see a growing number of patients in search of a family physician. We also know we have many retirement-age physicians with large practices, whose patients will need clear succession plans in place. Based on the association's membership information, 913 physicians (462 family doctors and 451 specialists) are over the age of 55. All system stakeholders must work together to recruit successfully, with a focus on compensation, practice environment and community support.

Compensation: To stabilize the physician workforce and strengthen the health-care system, Nova Scotia needs to continue to ensure it is offering competitive compensation and must remain on a path to becoming nationally competitive. Not only does this help recruit new physicians to Nova Scotia, but it also helps retain the physician talent we currently have.



A healthy practice environment is important too. Call burdens for rural specialists can often be excessive, and securing locums can be a challenge. We also need to continue to tackle issues like unnecessary administrative burden for physicians and ensuring a fair audit process.

Community support: Nova Scotia also needs to create a strong community of support for successful recruitment including a welcoming environment for new physicians to the province and employment opportunities for family members. We all have a role to play in making Nova Scotia a welcoming place to live and work.



REVITALIZING PRIMARY CARE AND ESTABLISHING A TASKFORCE

Primary care leaders and stakeholders in Nova Scotia would generally agree that an effective collaborative practice model is the future of primary care.

Research has demonstrated reduction in wait times, improved coordination of care, more appropriate referrals, less duplication of services and reduced emergency department visits when access to primary health care is enhanced using team-based approaches.

Collaborative care is desired by patients and providers alike. Collaborative practices are essential to recruitment and retention and continuing to support their adoption, implementation and evaluation is an important component to recruiting early career physicians.

But Nova Scotia needs a clear, shared vision for how we will move toward more effective collaborative primary care, supported by all provider groups and organizations involved in supporting the delivery of primary care services in this province.

While all Nova Scotians need and want access to quality and timely primary care, it is clear providers,

Nova Scotia Health, the Department of Health and Wellness and other health partners have not aligned around a vision of what that should look like and how we will get there.

Role clarity is needed not just in relation to the various provider groups involved in primary care, but also for the organizations involved in funding and delivering care. Until provider and system partners are aligned around one vision for primary care, physicians fear that our province will continue to focus on one-off solutions without making progress on our biggest shared priorities: access, patient attachment and better patient outcomes.

Doctors Nova Scotia recommends that a Primary Care Task Force bring together all primary care providers, health system partners and researchers to develop a shared understanding for primary care. The goal of the group could be to collectively develop the vision, define success, create an implementation plan, implement the plan and evaluate primary care.



LET'S KEEP IMPROVING TOGETHER

Over the past insert 16 months, Nova Scotia's COVID-19 response has been strong, integrated and effective. It has demonstrated what is possible when government, health-care providers and patients all work together. We are not clear of COVID-19 yet, but we can begin to think about how we move forward: Stronger, Together.