

Topic: Supporting a Physician Recruitment Strategy in Guelph and Wellington County

To: City of Guelph, County of Wellington and Guelph Chamber of Commerce

Date: October 3, 2023

Executive Summary

Guelph Wellington Ontario Health Team (GW OHT) partners identified the need for a physician recruitment strategy as part of the GW OHT 2022-2025 strategic priorities, which were released in July 2022. The GW OHT initially met with its partners in March 2023, where the urgency for Guelph and Wellington to develop a physician recruitment strategy, both for Primary Care and Specialist (hospital and community) physicians, was reiterated.

Key recommendations out of this meeting included:

- A. Completion of a needs assessment for GW OHT considering forecasted growth, existing and projected physician capacity (Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health is currently leading the development of a needs assessment)
- B. Exploring partnerships with the City, County and Chamber of Commerce to support a coordinated approach to attracting physicians and other health service providers

This business case recommends a cost-sharing approach to support the development of a physician recruitment strategy in Guelph and Wellington that compliments and augments but doesn't replace, existing physician recruitment efforts (See Appendix A). Recruitment is best completed by those who know/ are closest to the communities to which physicians are being recruited. In light of the increasing competition for limited physician resources and the anticipated growth in our communities, the GW OHT Physician Recruitment Strategy will support the efforts of those leading current recruitment efforts and augment their efforts where there are gaps and/or opportunities for shared efforts.

The GW OHT is seeking funding commitments from the City of Guelph, Wellington County and Guelph Chamber of Commerce. Funding sources would ideally be sustainable and not entirely dependent on time-limited contributions, as sustainability is key towards physician recruitment.

Background and Context

Living a healthy life in Guelph and Wellington requires access to primary care.



There are **166** Family Physicians (FP) providing care in Guelph Wellington. 95% are affiliated with team-based care



There are **254,247** health card holders in GW



52,346 (21%) are not rostered to a family physician



From 2016-2021, the City of Guelph's population increased by 9.5%, one of the fastest growing regions in Canada



7% of rostered patients are rostered to FPs older than 64 years old. The provincial average is 11%



Average patient roster of a FP in Guelph Wellington is 1298. The average patient roster in Mount Forest is 1457. The provincial average is 1200-1250.

In Wellington County, primary care physicians support hospital care and Emergency Department (ED) along with many other community activities including oncology clinics, coroner work, long term care, after-hours clinics, surgical programs, and obstetrics. Due to retirements and movement out of the community, there are a number of vacant physician positions in the communities we serve leaving a significant number of residents without primary care. This places a significant burden on the existing physicians to continue to support all aspects of care. The problem will be further exacerbated in 2024 by an additional retirement.

More broadly, there is a family physician shortage in Ontario. It is estimated that between 1.8 and 2.2 million Ontarians are living without a family doctor¹. The College of Family Physicians of Canada notes that fewer medical graduates are choosing family medicine as a specialty as the demands of the role are increasing. In addition, a good proportion of the currently practicing family physicians are later career and are opting to retire.

Guelph Wellington Human Resource Plans for Professional Staff

There are many existing physician recruitment initiatives led by GW OHT partners that have been successful in recruiting primary care physicians to the area – See Appendix A for a description of some of the current physician recruitment efforts underway across Guelph Wellington. Because of the highly organized primary care across Guelph Wellington, primary care team-focused recruitment efforts (in some cases, in partnership with township municipalities) have been very successful to date. Despite these efforts, in the context of increased competition, there is an identified benefit for a more coordinated strategy to attract physicians Guelph and Wellington.

Guelph General Hospital

Guelph General Hospital (GGH) is the primary hub for surgical and specialist care for all of Guelph Wellington. GGH has developed a Clinical Human Resources Plan (CHRP) for the recruitment and retention of professional staff for the next three to five years. It is designed to ensure that GGH can acquire and retain the most skilled professionals in a manner that satisfies community need for medical care while maintaining alignment with the hospital's strategic objectives. The report identified several key service pressures which impact recruitment of health human resources, including:

- Impending retirements and trend towards part-time work, especially among younger staff and those nearing retirement
- Population growth affects demand for all services;
- The increasing age and illness complexity of the population affects hospital services for adults and children;
- The establishment of a regional Vascular Surgery Program has increased demand for physician services in Intensive Care, ED, Hospital Medicine and Anaesthesiology;
- The Short Stay Assessment Unit and an enhanced regional role for Mental Health demands the recruitment of psychiatrists;
- The establishment of a Closed Access ICU Model has created a need for Intensivists and Hospital-Based Internists.
- Specialized care in a number of specialties is not available in our community: Plastic Surgery, Hematology - or our region – Neurosurgery. Limited availability of consultant services in many areas.
- It is estimated that approximately 23 specialists need to be recruited over the next 2 years

Wellington Health Care Alliance

The Wellington Health Care Alliance provides primary and secondary hospital care in close collaboration with primary care physicians and teams. Retirements and impending retirements, increasing complexity of patients, and the growth of the communities the organization service is resulting in significant pressures on physician resources. At NWHC physicians support primary care and the emergency department and inpatient functions at the hospital. At GMCH, the model is evolving to subspecialty support alongside primary care. WHCA has developed a Professional Staff Human

¹ <https://lifewithoutadoctor.ca/>

Resource Plan that identifies key areas of focused recruitment over the next 5 years. The plan has identified the following physician needs:

WHCA	NWHC	GMCH
Primary Care Physicians	6	6-8
ED	(Included in Primary Care #)	4-6
Hospitalist	(Included in Primary Care #)	2-3
General Surgeon	0	2
Internal Medicine	1	2
OB GYN		1
Endocrinology	.5	.5

The intent of a GW OHT strategy is to support / coordinate existing efforts and address gaps in recruitment. A coordinated Guelph Wellington strategy may reduce workload by reducing duplicative recruitment efforts and may support recruitment focused on the needs of the whole community vs individual organizations. A community-focused strategy may also support recruitment efforts by attracting physicians who are seeking variety in their practice by offering opportunities across urban and rural and /or other practice settings.

Economic Benefit and Return on Investment

Many patients are turning to emergency rooms for primary healthcare and are contributing to hospital overcrowding. When the system is stressed or caregivers are rushed, decision making is altered, rates of error increase, and important processes of care are impeded. For example, healthcare providers may limit tests, shorten consultations, or shorten observation periods to free space for other patients. Multiple studies referenced by the Fraser Institute found there to be statistically significant linkages between an increase in primary care physicians per capita with lower mortality rates.

In the context of post-pandemic human resource shortages, the economic benefits of physician recruitment and retention cannot be understated. Appropriate access to health care services, including primary care and specialist (hospital and community) physicians, is a promotional tool that will support recruitment of skilled workers to high demand sectors across Guelph Wellington.

Dr. Al Lauzon from the University of Guelph, suggests that economic and general well-being of regions and their residents are directly related to the well-being of the healthcare sector and the well-being of the health care sector is dependent on physicians². According to his 2013 research, Dr Lauzon concluded that every dollar spent on physician recruitment generates an additional \$198.54 in the regional economy.

The Fraser Institute released in 2013 a collection of articles titled 'Reducing Wait Times for Health Care: What Canada Can Learn from Theory and International Experience'³ and found that patients or caregivers of patients waiting for healthcare typically displayed a reduction in economic activity caused by absenteeism (time spent out of the workforce as a consequence of untreated health problems), or presenteeism (reduced on-the-job productivity of employees as a consequence of health problems). There are also avoidable healthcare system and productivity costs including additional appointments, tests, procedures, and medications associated with delayed medical care.

Investing in physician recruitment not only addresses economics through productivity, but Ministry of Health payments made to physicians constitute a significant influx of funds into regional economies. Recruited physicians, and their clinic

² <https://www.scribd.com/document/237500157/Contributions-of-Physician-Recruitment-to-Regional-Economic-Development-Case-of-Windsor-Essex-Ontario>

³ <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/reducing-wait-times-for-health-care.pdf>

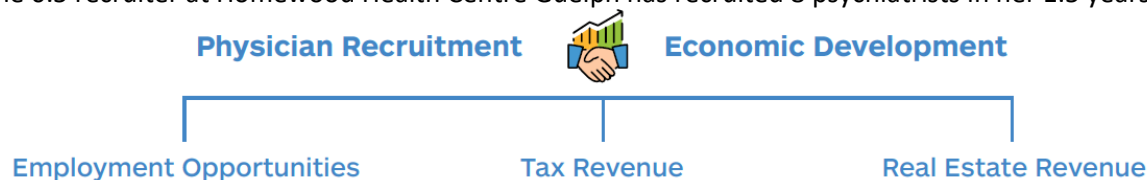
staff, require housing. Physicians also generate additional regional capital through the employment they create and the rental income for landlords. Office space renovation or construction of new space supports local economies.

According to a report by the Conference Board of Canada, physicians’ offices, in addition to providing important health care services, also provide a noticeable contribution to the Canadian economy⁴. In 2019, physicians’ offices contributed \$27.37 billion to Canada’s GDP. This amount reflects the value-added contribution of funds spent in physicians’ offices on wages, salaries, and profits. Meanwhile, the direct employment associated with physicians’ offices is estimated at ~ 167,000 jobs.

There is limited published data regarding the effectiveness of physician recruitment programs. Smaller areas with less population may bring in fewer physicians than larger communities. Some examples:

- The 1.0 FTE Regional Recruitment and Retention Specialist in Niagara works with 15-18 physicians every year and has recruited 77 physicians in her 5 years in the role.

The 0.5 recruiter at Homewood Health Centre Guelph has recruited 8 psychiatrists in her 1.5 years in the role



- Every dollar spent on physician recruitment generated \$198.54 to the regional economy (Windsor Essex case Study)
- Physicians offices contributed nearly \$14B to Ontario’s GDP in 2019 (Conference Board of Canada)
- At the time of the 2021 census, the population of Guelph and Wellington County was 241,000, and is expected to continue to grow

Strategic Alignment

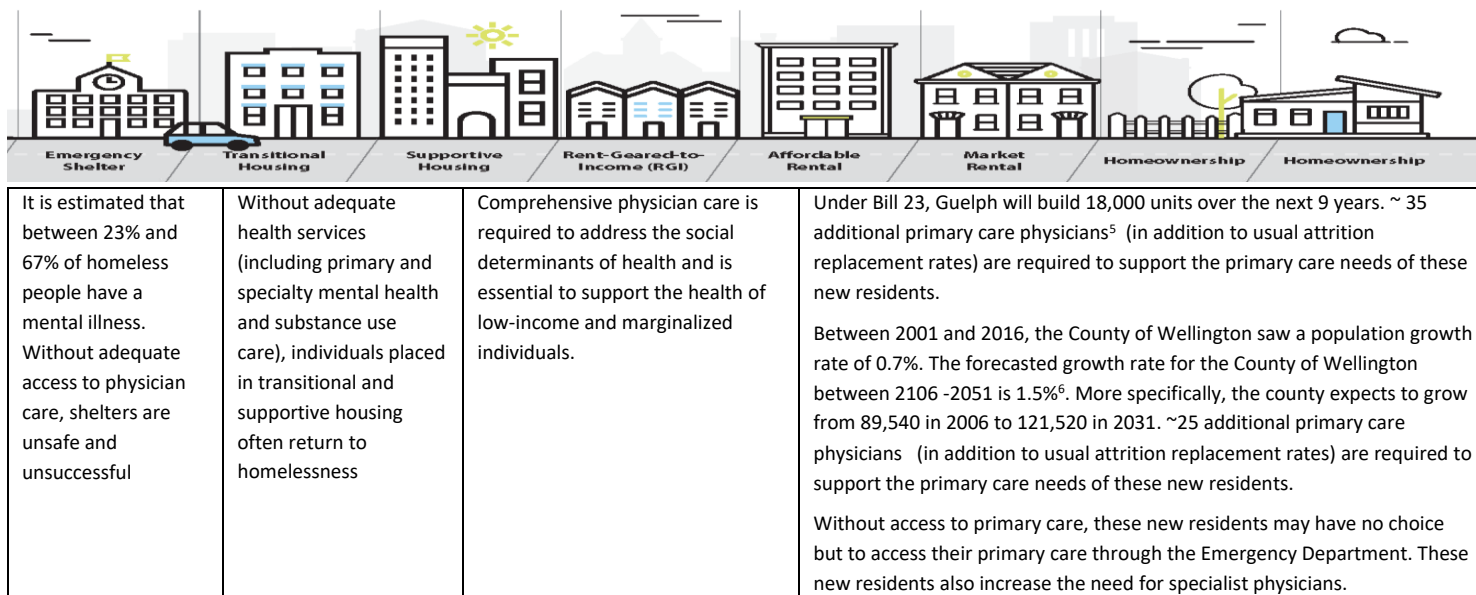
Health care is a provincial responsibility yet physician recruitment is not funded by the Ministry of Health. Our municipal and commerce partners appreciate their role in promoting the health and well-being of our residents and in supporting efforts to ensure there is sufficient physician capacity to meet the health care needs of the residents of Guelph and Wellington County.

Housing is a critical priority for every community. From market housing to emergency crisis shelters, adequate physician support is ESSENTIAL so as to not overburden our acute care system including hospital, EMS/paramedics etc. Our health care system does not have the capacity to meet the needs of the planned influx of new residents – physician recruitment needs to be an essential part of the housing plan. The following describes the demands that each sector of the housing continuum places on the need for physician capacity:

⁴ [The Economic Influence of Physicians’ Offices \(cma.ca\)](https://www.cma.ca)

HOUSING CONTINUUM

Guelph-Wellington



In addition to aligning with the GW OHT strategic priorities, a physician recruitment strategy aligns with the following strategic priorities of the City of Guelph, Wellington County, and Guelph Chamber of Commerce.

- City of Guelph - City building; supporting elements needed to make Guelph a more livable place
- City of Guelph – Support community well-being and help local economy
- Wellington County – Focus on people as the main driving force behind Wellington County
- Chamber of Commerce – Enable businesses and citizens to thrive

The GW OHT strategy will focus on the features that set Guelph Wellington apart from other communities including health and well-being/quality of life, central proximity, ethnic/religious diversity, high degree of primary care organization, urban/rural mix etc. Competition for physicians is high – innovative and differentiating strategies and tactics are required.

The GW OHT Physician Recruitment Strategy will be complimented by continued efforts across GW OHT partners (as per two GW OHT 2022-2025 strategic goals) to recruit all health human resources and to optimize the scopes of practice of HHR resources.

Environmental Scan

The table below provides an overview of physician recruitment strategies that exist in other municipalities/OHTs. These programs consist of entirely municipally funded strategies or partially funded programs in partnership with other organizations.

Region	Program	Annual Budget	Funders	Oversight
Middlesex London	Physician Recruitment (In development)	\$200,000	City of London, Middlesex County, London Economic Development,	Middlesex London OHT

⁵ Assuming an average 2.5 residents per household and base don a roster size of 1298

⁶ <https://www.wellington.ca/en/resident-services/resources/Planning/Official-Plan/Official-Plan-Review/PD2023-03-County-Official-Plan-Review---OPA-120-Recommendation-Report.pdf>

			Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry, London Health Sciences Centre, St. Joseph's Health Care, Middlesex Hospital Alliance	
Sarnia	Bluecoast Primary Care	\$100K	City of Sarnia, Lambton County	Bluecoast Recruitment Task Force
Kingston	Possible Made Here	\$250K + \$35K	City of Kingston	Kingston City Council
Hamilton	Hamilton Physicians	\$180K	City of Hamilton McMaster University Hamilton FHT McMaster Dept of FM Hamilton Health Sciences St. Joseph's Health Care Greater Hamilton Health Network OHT Hamilton Chamber of Commerce	GHHN OHT
KW	Greater KW Physician Recruitment	Unknown	Municipal and Corporate Funding	Chamber Health Care Resources Council
Cambridge	Doctors4Cambridge	\$100K	City, hospital, private donors	Chamber of Commerce

Funding Request

A physician recruitment strategy, supported by dedicated resources, is required. The first task will be to map existing physician recruitment efforts across Guelph Wellington partners, reflect on what is needed to enhance recruitment efforts and then design a strategy that builds on and compliments local efforts and opportunities. Physician recruitment strategy best practices are well established and will be considered in the design of this strategy. See Appendix B for a summary of best practices/features of a physician recruitment strategy. As opportunities to enhance existing recruitment efforts are identified, they will addressed in collaboration with system partners.

Accordingly, the GW OHT is seeking a sustainable funding commitment from the City of Guelph, County of Wellington and Guelph Chamber of Commerce to support recruitment, retention and succession planning for physicians. The funds will be used to support dedicated resources to develop the strategy, to support the functions of existing recruitment programs and to perform recruitment functions that are identified as being missing from a GW OHT physician recruitment strategy.

Budget

Item	Annual Cost
Physician Recruitment Strategy Development	\$75,000
Technology & Supplies	\$5,000
Travel (to support recruitment efforts all GW OHT partners)	\$15,000
Engagement Activities (to support recruitment efforts all GW OHT partners)	\$35,000
Total	\$130,000

The GW OHT proposes that the cost of supporting the Physician Recruitment Strategy be shared equally between the City of Guelph, County of Wellington, Guelph Chamber of Commerce – each contributing \$43,335 per year for two years. An evaluation after Year 1 will be completed to determine the need for funding to sustain the strategy.

The GW OHT will host the position and provide back-office and other administrative support.

The GW OHT is also collaborating with other OHTs in Western Ontario to apply for funding to support an international physician recruitment alliance.

Appendix A: Existing physician recruitment initiatives led by GW OHT partners

One of the first steps in working towards the Guelph Wellington OHT’s strategic goal to “*have a physician recruitment strategy to meet the needs of our growing communities*” is to understand the past and current efforts of partners to attract/recruit physicians.

The following is a summary of current efforts that have been / are being undertaken by Guelph Wellington OHT partners to support physician recruitment:

Wellington Health Care Recruitment - https://www.whcrecruit.com/home	
Minto Mapleton Recruitment Committee	Each includes representative(s) from hospital, FHO, FHT community, municipality Respective townships contribute \$ to each committee to support the activities of the committee. WHCA supports the salary of the recruiter
Mount Forest Recruitment Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust medical training programs at NWHC and GMCH • Attend recruitment fairs
Centre Wellington Recruitment Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated Wellington Health Care Recruitment website for both nurses and physicians • Working on housing supports for locums, medical trainees, hospitalist program • Minto-Mapleton and Mount Forest are eligible for the Northern-Rural Recruitment and Retention program and receive financial incentives for return-of-service. Centre Wellington is not eligible for the same funding due to their proximity to urban centres • Minto-Mapleton, Centre Wellington and Mount Forest are eligible for tuition reimbursement program (applies to both nurses and physicians) • Provide site visits to interested candidates • Work with Health Force Ontario also post jobs on HFO • Have a dedicated social media marketing campaign targeting health care recruitment <p>Support for these groups is provided by WHCA Communications and Stakeholder Relations staff who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create health care recruitment marketing and branding (websites, social media, banners, swag etc.). • work with various Municipalities, Economic Development, Chamber of Commerce, Travel and Tourism to support health care recruitment efforts – this includes presenting to councils and asking for funding • work with medical schools, medical trainees • work with all physicians (including family docs and specialists) to plan for retirements, determine HR needs etc. • liaise with interested candidates (the initial contact. work with the physicians to plan site/community visits together • attend medical school events with physicians.
Guelph General Hospital	
Guelph General Hospital has a comprehensive Clinical Human Resource Plan (CHRP) 2022-2025 for the recruitment and privileging of Professional Staff that:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aligns with the GGH HR Plan for employees and is intimately tied to current financial means to ensure that changes in manpower are supported by a robust impact analysis before approval of adjustments. 	

- reflects an organized approach to planning that aligns expectations between Professional Staff, Administration and Board for the next three to five year period.
- is designed to ensure that Guelph General Hospital can acquire and retain the most skilled professionals in a manner that satisfies community need for medical care while maintaining alignment with the Strategic Plan, Master Plan, the GGH Mission, Vision and Values and budgetary restraint.
- GGH PS have a mentoring and on-boarding process to help new physicians navigate through the hospital and community.

Guelph Community Health Centre

5 years ago we develop a relationship with McMaster and we have residents as a way to expose them to the CHC model in hopes that some people will want to work in a salaried model.

Canadian Mental Health Association WW

With the help of our community partners, we recruited a new child psychiatrist for our community (started in September 2022) which has created tremendous capacity for community referrals through our children's mental health service.

Homewood Health Centre

Catriona Forbes, Director of Physician Relations (since October 2021)

Recruited psychiatrists to replace those who left the organization: Dr. Angela Park - 2022 , Dr. Shane Kang – 2021, Dr. Sherief El Gaaly - 2022

Feedback from those who have been successfully hired include:

- a 'warm' introduction - one person who is the main contact for any and all queries.
- a site visit with sit down meetings with both the chief of staff and the service chief
- independent meetings with those who will be their psychiatry colleagues as well as IDT (important here that they are alone, so that they can hear the 'real deal' - all of the good bad and ugly about the organization so they know what they are getting into, after all, no organization is perfect 😊)
- An orientation to the city - wide ranging here, but this would include schools, real estate (what 'vibe' each of the areas has), food (this is especially true for diverse candidates who love some connection to 'home')
- ongoing support and mentorship - of particular interest to younger hires. This is tough in a fee-for-service world where it is costly for a mentor to take time out to help.
- Connection to academia, research and continued learning - supported both through educational assistance and interactions with residents and rounds

East Wellington FHT

Organizational outreach, largely done by Lead Physician and ED

Existing EWFHT physicians leverage their networks to assist with promotion of physician positions

Utilize the following promotional channels for postings:

AFHTO Careers page

College of Family Physicians of Canada

Departments of Family & Community Medicine for UofT, McMaster, Western, Queens

Physicians' FB page for new grads

Waterloo Wellington FHT network

Cherry Health Physician Recruitment platform

Canadian Family Physician Journal – ad in monthly publication sent to +34,000 CCFP members across Canada, in paper and digital format

Guelph FHT

Organizational outreach, largely done by ED

Existing Guelph FHT physicians leverage their networks to assist

Utilize the following promotional channels:

- College of Family Physicians of Canada
- Canadian Family Physician Journal
- McMaster KW & Area 2023 Family Medicine Recruitment Event
- HealthForceOntario
- AFHTO Careers page
- Departments of Family & Community Medicine for UofT, McMaster, Western, Queens
- Physicians’ FB page for new grads
- Waterloo Wellington FHT network

Guelph was the only local community not designated by the Ministry as underserved for many years, restricting the recruitment of new FHO doctors . Guelph FHT successfully negotiated with the Ministry for exceptions per year to the Ministry cap, based on our high population growth, allowing the recruitment of about two new doctors per year(roughly 2,000-2,500 new patients.)

We work with candidates to understand what kind of practice the new docs are looking for, clinical mentoring needs, preferred practice setting. We support clinical interests as well e.g., palliative care, surgical assists, Student wellness, IT systems development etc.

	New FPs in Guelph	When they came to Guelph	Replace a retiring doctor or new practice
	Shaw, Matthew	2023	replace
	Traplin, Alex	2023	replace
	Abdelmalak, Peter	2023	new
	Yu, Chungming	2023	replace
	Webb, Cooper	2023	replace
	Duncan, Ashleigh	2023	new

We continue our efforts to attract doctors who speak the languages that are spoken by newer residents of Guelph.

Appendix B: Best Practices Elements of a Physician Recruitment Strategy (see [CaSPR](#))

Leadership – lead the recruitment and retention program,

Engage – on-going assessment of the needs of stakeholders/partners and potential opportunities

Recruitment and Retention

Marketing & Promotion – job fairs, website, social media, postings, site visits/tours

Evaluation – strategy effectiveness/impact, enablers & barriers

