



HEALTH INNOVATIONS

NAME OF PRACTICE: The Rural Road Map for Action: Directions

JURISDICTION: National

HEALTH THEME: Policy-General, Planning-General, Skill Mix, Supply/Demand, Retention/Turnover, Practice Guidelines, Human Resource Management, Health Human Resources-General, Education-General

HEALTH SECTOR: Aboriginal Healthcare, Rural Healthcare

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: 2017

Canadians living in rural communities have long had challenges obtaining equitable access to health care services. Local services are often limited, with fewer physicians and other health care professionals living and working in rural communities. Geographic, environmental, and organizational factors result in challenges accessing care outside of the community. In general, rural Canadians are older, poorer, and sicker than their urban counterparts. They constitute 18% of the Canadian population but are served by only 8% of the physicians practising in Canada. Increased urbanization and centralization of medical services have further stressed this situation. Disparities in Indigenous health and access to care for Indigenous people in rural Canada are pronounced. In order to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action, as well as the Canada Health Act mandate to “facilitate reasonable access to health services without financial or other barriers,” rural Canadians must be better served.

The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) and the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada (SRPC) formed a joint taskforce (Taskforce) in 2014, with the goal to improve the health of rural Canadians by producing and sustaining an increased number of family physicians practising comprehensive rural generalist medicine. The Taskforce advocates a social accountability mandate with recommendations for a

renewed approach to physician workforce planning for rural Canada. The Taskforce includes members from the CFPC, SRPC, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada, Federal/Provincial/Territorial (F/P/T) Committee on Health Workforce, Canadian Medical Association, as well as medical school deans and practising rural physicians from across Canada.

The social accountability framework for medical schools defined by the World Health Organization in 1995 is “the obligation to direct education, research and service activities towards addressing the priority health concerns of the community, region and/or nation they have a mandate to serve.” The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada’s Future of Medical Education in Canada (FMEC): A

Collective Vision for MD Education reinforces recommendations for social accountability, addressing the health needs of all Canadians, and the importance of generalism in the Canadian context. However, the imperative for timely access to quality rural health services goes beyond developing education. Education and practice must be considered together, with essential infrastructure and support to sustain comprehensive generalist practice and provide equitable access to services for rural communities.

The Taskforce used combined expertise, background research, literature reviews, and an environmental scan to create recommendations for a well-coordinated approach to providing health care in rural communities. Four directions and 20 actions have been designed for developing a framework to improve access to care for rural communities. The goal is to strengthen a physician workforce with the competencies and skills to provide high-quality and culturally safe care, work in innovative team environments with allied health care providers, and respond to the needs of people who live in rural communities. The recommendations propose collective actions with outcomes that are measurable and sustainable, building on and enhancing existing successful initiatives to improve the health of Canadians in rural communities. They require system-wide alignment in education, practice, policy, and research. This approach has the potential to revitalize rural health care in Canada and positively affect the entire Canadian health system.

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