

Dear Mayor Towndale and Members of the Mayor's Task Force on Medical Recruitment,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written submission in advance of the presentation on Wednesday, August 14, 2024. Seaway Valley Community Health Centre (SVCHC) commends your efforts to modernize the City of Cornwall's current medical recruitment strategies and programs in ways that will benefit our community.

About SVCHC and Community Health Centers

A Community Health Centre (CHC) is a model of care that emphasizes comprehensive, team-based healthcare tailored to the needs of the community it serves. Funded by the Ontario government, our approach focuses on addressing not only physical health but also the social determinants of health, such as income, education, and housing. CHCs have been shown to improve health outcomes, reduce hospital admissions, and provide cost-effective care by addressing the root causes of health issues. Our comprehensive, client-centered approach has become a model for delivering effective and equitable healthcare, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized populations.

Our team is comprised of many health care professionals and roles including:

- 4 Physicians
- 8 Nurse Practitioners
- 12 Nurses
- 2 Registered Dietitians
- 2 Social/ Mental Health Workers
- 1 Physiotherapist
- 1 Respiratory Therapist
- 1 Pharmacist
- 3 Community Health Workers
- 2 Health Promoters
- 10 Medical Reception/ Administrative Support
- 3 Managers
- 1 Executive Director

Since its opening in 2010, SVCHC has expanded significantly, now employing 50 staff members. Due to retirements, leaves and the creation of new roles over the past three years, the centre has successfully recruited more than 30 new healthcare professionals, including four physicians and four nurse practitioners. Through this process, several recruitment trends have become evident.

One of the key attractions for physicians specifically, is the CHC model. It has many advantages, particularly in terms of being a salaried payment model, as opposed to OHIP billing. This model also significantly reduces the administrative burden, as CHCs manage much of the paperwork and overhead costs that can be challenging in other settings. As a result, physicians can dedicate more time to patient care, enhancing job satisfaction. This model has proven especially appealing to new and recent graduates.

The availability of physical space is also an attractive factor for health care professionals. We've noticed a growing number of specialists who prefer to join and share space with organizations like ours rather than setting up and maintaining their own facilities. This trend is especially

prevalent among specialists living outside the area who want to help serve our high-needs community in at least a part-time capacity. That said however, existing organizations face constraints with both operating funds and available space, so these types of arrangements are not always feasible.

Additionally, for both physicians and nurse practitioners, the CHC environment offers the reassurance of working within a multidisciplinary team that supports comprehensive patient care. The ability to easily consult with social workers, dietitians, pharmacists, and other professionals plays a crucial role in delivering high-quality, full-circle care. New graduates also value the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with their colleagues in this setting.

Across various roles, there is an increasing desire among individuals to achieve a better work-life balance. CHCs are appealing because they typically offer more predictable, daytime hours compared to other healthcare settings. This can significantly enhance work-life balance, making CHCs especially attractive to healthcare professionals, particularly those with young families.

Despite these benefits, however, CHCs sometimes struggle to compete with the recruitment incentives offered in other communities and, notably, in the U.S. These incentives often include student loan repayment programs, signing bonuses, and reimbursement for moving expenses. These are valid and compelling reasons that some physicians and nurse practitioners have cited when declining employment offers.

Additionally, for years, healthcare providers and administrative staff in community based non-profit primary, community, mental health and addiction, and long-term care have faced lower pay grades than other parts of the healthcare sector. The current level of funding is inadequate and does not keep up with inflation or cost of living, which makes recruiting and retaining staff a challenge. Our organization has struggled to keep and hire staff, particularly nurses as we cannot compete with the wages of those working in hospital settings. This is an area where we continue to advocate with our partners at the provincial level.

Healthcare Gaps and Areas of Risk

While the healthcare sector faces numerous challenges, the most pressing issue, from our perspective, is the shortage of primary care providers, including both nurse practitioners and physicians in team-based settings. Our community is particularly affected by a wave of recent and upcoming physician retirements, which compounds the already significant number of individuals without access to a healthcare provider. A recent survey by the Great River Ontario Health Team indicates that our area is currently short by at least 16 full-time primary care clinicians. Over the next 3-5 years, we anticipate needing an additional 17 full-time providers to address these retirements.

This shortage is especially concerning for our newborn and early years populations, who may not receive the essential primary care needed for a healthy start in life, as well as for our growing

senior population. [Data shows that the number of residents aged 65 and older will significantly increase in the coming years](#), further straining our healthcare system.

Our city's residents face complex and chronic health issues, exacerbated by factors such as material deprivation and marginalization. Major health concerns in our community include respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, hypertension, diabetes, and a rising prevalence of addiction and mental health issues. These challenges underscore the urgent need for more primary care providers and allied health professionals working together in primary health care settings to meet the evolving needs of our population. It's a well-known fact that primary care is the foundation of an effective health care system, and one that requires significant investment.

Current Medical Recruitment Strategies & Programs

The City of Cornwall's current Medical Scholarship and Medical Recruitment programs have achieved success over the years and have supported many deserving physicians and specialists. However, our experience has highlighted several limitations within these programs:

1. **Exclusion of Other Healthcare Professionals:** By focusing exclusively on physicians, the programs overlook other professionals, such as nurse practitioners (NPs), who also make significant contributions to the healthcare system. These individuals should have equal access to financial support and recognition of their credentials.
2. **Limited Incentive for CHC Physicians:** The programs offer financial assistance for physicians and specialists to establish practices in Cornwall, but this incentive is less relevant for those working within the CHC model, where office space and equipment are already provided by the organization's budget.
3. **Narrow Partnership Scope:** The exclusive partnership between Cornwall Hospital and the City limits the involvement of other models of care and organizations that could contribute valuable perspectives and resources to the programs.
4. **Restrictive Scholarship Criteria:** While offering scholarships to local students is commendable, the criteria could be broadened to make a greater impact, especially considering the significant shortage of primary care providers in our community. Expanding eligibility could help address the pressing need for more healthcare professionals.

Opportunity for Improvement

Building on the successes and insights gained from current initiatives, there is potential to refine and diversify the City's recruitment strategies and programs. Given the varied needs, preferences, and factors influencing medical professionals when considering Cornwall as a place to practice, a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer sufficient. Instead, offering multiple strategies will allow medical professionals to choose the option that best aligns with their individual needs

and preferred work environment. For instance, while one student might value the \$25,000 per year over six years, another might need support for retraining in Canada, and yet another might prioritize assistance with moving costs, housing, or student loan repayment.

We are better, together.

SVCHC plays a crucial role in health care recruitment within our community and anticipates continued growth in the coming years. [Recently designated as the transfer payment agency for a \\$4 million investment in regional primary care resources](#), and selected by Ontario Health as the local organization to establish a new program, [Healthy Sprouts](#), SVCHC is well-positioned to continue to lead and address the needs of our area.

We believe in the power of collaboration and propose a new approach to recruitment through a regional committee, guided by a dedicated regional staff resource. This individual would work with partners to advance recruitment strategies, rather than relying on a single lead agency. With enhanced training, this resource could become an expert in recruiting, onboarding, and supporting foreign-trained health professionals and primary care providers from other provinces to support all organizations. This is a challenging task that demands focused attention and specialized expertise.

This person could also facilitate collaboration among partners, tapping into the knowledge and lived experience of current medical professionals and ensure that committee representatives comprehensively understand and promote all the opportunities available in our community. This group could also ensure that local recruitment strategies align with Ontario Health priorities and plans. Although the committee may not handle all recruitment efforts, it would significantly enhance the work of individual organizations and promote employment opportunities in a more impactful way.

Final Thoughts

As the task force progresses, I want to express our organization's deep appreciation for your efforts. We encourage the group to adopt a comprehensive approach, seeking feedback and maintaining dialogue with those actively engaged in various healthcare organizations.

Additionally, it's important to recognize that all aspects are interconnected. While recruitment strategies and programs are crucial, factors such as housing, schools, adequate childcare spaces, recreational facilities, and other community experiences are equally important and will play into the decision making of prospective professionals.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Killoran
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