



Associations Representing Interprofessional Primary Health Care 2025 Pre-Budget Submission

Primary care is in crisis due to the growing wage gap that has now led to a primary care workforce foundation that continues to face increasing pressures. The associations representing interprofessional primary health care of the Primary Care Collaborative (PCC) have come together with proposed solutions to rebuild the primary care workforce foundation so that Ontarians can **access the right care in the right place close to home.**



RIGHT CARE IN THE RIGHT PLACE CLOSE TO HOME

PRIMARY CARE IS IN CRISIS. THE SITUATION IS NOW DIRE.

Current projections show that one in four Ontarians could be without access to primary care in three short years; this is truly alarming and should be the focus of our health system transformation. All Ontarians deserve access to comprehensive and accessible care close to where they live, delivered through an interprofessional primary care team that ensures they get the care and support they need to improve their health and wellbeing. To echo the words of the provincial government in its *Your Health Plan*, Ontarians deserve **the right care in the right place close to home**. However, this crisis has put **the government's mandate of ensuring every Ontarian has access and is attached to the right care in the right place in serious jeopardy**.

Despite the daunting primary care crisis, primary care organizations and their staff across the province are unwavering in their commitment to fulfilling the province's mandate and providing the right care in the right place to Ontarians in their communities. They aim to have all Ontarians living in the communities they serve attached to a family doctor or nurse practitioner, supported by a team of interprofessional primary health care providers, to keep them healthy, safe, and out of hospitals and emergency departments.

The primary care sector is seeing higher turnover rates than ever before, with challenges in recruiting and retaining experienced health professionals. The funding and health human resources (HHR) challenges impacting the primary care sector threaten their capacity to deliver on the government's core promise of providing all Ontarians comprehensive primary care and ensuring people are connected to convenient care in their local community, no matter where they live in Ontario.

These HHR challenges stem from the fact that the community health sector, including the primary care sector, is witnessing an exodus of primary care staff to other sectors and parts of the healthcare system for better pay, making recruiting and retaining essential health care workers increasingly challenging. The primary care sector is rapidly and substantially losing staff due to the critical wage gap it faces compared to other parts of the health system, which currently amounts to a **wage gap of approximately \$430.9 million**.

As a result of this wage gap, primary care organizations are unable to retain their current staff, unable to recruit new staff, and find themselves forced to cut services their communities depend on due to vacant positions.

As the provincial representatives of primary health care, the associations representing interprofessional primary health care of the Primary Care Collaborative (PCC) believe that investing in and adequately funding primary care is a critical step toward its sustainability. This will ensure that primary care is firmly rooted as the foundation of an integrated, robust, and sustainable health system.

A fully staffed primary care sector keeps people healthy in their communities and homes and out of emergency rooms and hospitals. At the same time, it ensures efficient and maximum usage of healthcare funding towards improving equitable health outcomes for all Ontarians, no matter where they reside in the province. Without an emphasis on recruiting and retaining dedicated community-based primary care staff in our communities, the government's vision of all Ontarians receiving the right care in the right place becomes a near-impossible reality. As a result, Ontarians will not be able to access and be attached to primary care in their community, which will strain other parts of the healthcare system, such as emergency and acute care. The impact of this wage gap has been and will continue to be severely felt by all Ontarians, especially those who experience inequitable access to primary care in Ontario, including, but

not limited to, Indigenous peoples, Francophones, Black and racialized communities, those who are Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Non-binary (2SLGBTQ+), and those who live in rural, remote, and northern communities.

Therefore, the Government of Ontario must make the appropriate investments to address the HHR crisis in primary care by properly funding HHR, recruitment and retention, and operations for primary care organizations. With sufficient funding, our members can start immediately attaching more people to primary care to ensure the government's vision of 100% attachment in a five-year span can become a reality.

The associations representing interprofessional primary health care of the PCC ask that the government focus on enhancing system capacity by addressing the HHR and recruitment and retention challenges impacting primary care.

WORKING FOR WORKERS

CREATE SYSTEM CAPACITY BY ADDRESSING THE HEALTH HUMAN RESOURCES (HHR) & RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CHALLENGES

Ontario's primary care sector faces an **HHR and recruitment and retention crisis** caused by the growing wage gap between primary care workers and health care workers in other sectors. For years, primary care and administrative staff working in community-based non-profit primary, community, and mental health and addiction primary health care organizations 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 and the rapidly increasing cost of living, which makes recruiting and retaining staff a significant and historic challenge in this sector.

The primary care sector faces a wage gap of approximately \$430.9 million. The [Ontario Community Health Compensation Market Salary Review](#) demonstrated that primary health care staff have not received a salary increase despite the rising cost of living and a competitive healthcare job market. This significantly pales compared to the 11% increase awarded to hospital nurses, the 8% increase for emergency medical services, and the 9.95% that physicians were awarded for year one of a four-year agreement, **further exacerbating the problem in interprofessional primary care teams**. Despite the limited growth in wages, the primary care workforce remains steadfast in its commitment to support the health and wellbeing of Ontarians, but considering the rising cost of living, a sustainable approach to addressing the wage gap is critical to ensure the continued delivery of safe and high-quality primary health care and to continue providing the right care in the right place for Ontarians.

Primary care staff have been paid at or below 2017 salary rates and are leaving the sector as the cost of living rises. If this continues, with compensation being years behind other parts of the healthcare sector, we will see increases in hospitalizations and emergency department usage as primary care will be unable to sustain care for all Ontarians. **The consequences of government inaction on this wage gap are dire: service cuts, longer wait times, and increased overcrowding in emergency departments and hospitals in communities throughout Ontario.**

We appreciate the Government of Ontario's investments in new teams to expand access and increase attachment to primary health care across Ontario. These investments include the \$110 million investment for new teams and to add team members and the \$20 million investment for operational costs. However, **that funding did not help existing pressures tied to recruitment and retention challenges, nor did this funding address the wage gap for new or expanding teams.** Recruiting and retaining existing interprofessional team members is challenging without competitive wages.

We would also like to applaud the government for repealing Bill 124, which the Ontario Superior Court of Justice ruled unconstitutional. This Bill capped healthcare workers' salary increases at 1%, which did not keep up with inflation. Since its repeal, the government has paid up to \$7 billion in retroactive payments to public sector employees. **However, health care workers in primary care have not seen any retroactive or go-forward payments since the Bill was repealed.**

Under Premier Doug Ford's leadership, this government promises to work for workers. However, for this to be true, the government must address the wage gap impacting the primary care workforce to truly work for workers who are detrimental to advancing the government's priority of ensuring Ontarians receive the right care in the right place, at the right time within their communities and close to home.

The associations representing interprofessional primary health care of the PCC would like to provide the government with the following **two key solutions** to support and guide its actions in addressing the HHR and recruitment and retention challenges impacting primary care.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

1. We call on the Government of Ontario to **invest approximately \$430.9 million over five years, including an annual adjustment of 2.90%, in the primary care sector in Ontario to close the significant wage gap impacting primary health care.** The government must also ensure these investments are permanent and targeted at increasing wages to address the **health human resource challenges** impacting organizations' ability to recruit and retain staff. These investments towards wages in primary care can **support existing teams, keep people attached to an interprofessional primary care team, allow for additional capacity to expand service delivery to attach new patients and, therefore, connect unattached Ontarians lacking access to a team of family doctors, nurse practitioners, and interprofessional primary care providers.** Without this critical investment, there is **no way** to collectively meet Ontario's goal of 100% attachment in the near future.
2. We call on the government to **provide retroactive and go-forward payments for Bill 124 to health care workers employed in the primary care sector.**



The associations representing interprofessional primary health care of the Primary Care Collaborative thank the government for the opportunity to submit our collective solutions.

These solutions are critical in **rebuilding and strengthening the workforce of a critical sector that is the foundation of Ontario's health system.**

By *Working for Workers*, including the primary care workforce of Ontario, Ontarians can access **better, more integrated care**, keeping them well at home, in their communities, and out of the hospital—the right care in the right place close to home.



Alliance for
Healthier Communities
Alliance pour des
communautés en santé

[The Alliance for Healthier](#)

[Communities \(Alliance\)](#) is the voice of a vibrant network of over 110 community-governed comprehensive primary health care organizations across Ontario, including Community Health Centres, Aboriginal Health Access Centres, Community Family Health Teams, and Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics. Alliance members share commitments to advancing health equity through comprehensive primary health care.



[The Indigenous Primary Health Care](#)

[Council \(IPHCC\)](#) is an Indigenous-governed, culture-based, and Indigenous-informed organization. Its key mandate is to support the advancement and evolution of Indigenous primary health care services provision and planning throughout Ontario. Membership includes Aboriginal Health Access Centres (AHAC), Aboriginal-governed Community Health Centres (ACHC), and other Indigenous-governed providers.



[The Association of Family Health](#)

[Teams of Ontario \(AFHTO\)](#) is a not-for-profit association that provides leadership to promote high-quality, comprehensive, well-integrated interprofessional primary care for the benefit of all Ontarians. We are an advocate and resource for family health teams, nurse practitioner-led clinics, and other interprofessional models.



A corporate member of NPAO

Nurse Practitioner-led Clinic
ASSOCIATION

[The Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic](#)

[Association \(NPLCA\)](#) is the voice of nurse practitioner-led clinics (NPLCs) across Ontario. Nurse practitioners are the lead primary care providers of these interprofessional teams that improve the quality of care through enhanced health promotion, disease prevention, primary mental health care, and chronic disease management while supporting care coordination and navigation of the healthcare system.