



association of family
health teams of ontario

For AFHTO
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Ensuring Access to Primary Care: A Path Forward to Health Equity in Ontario

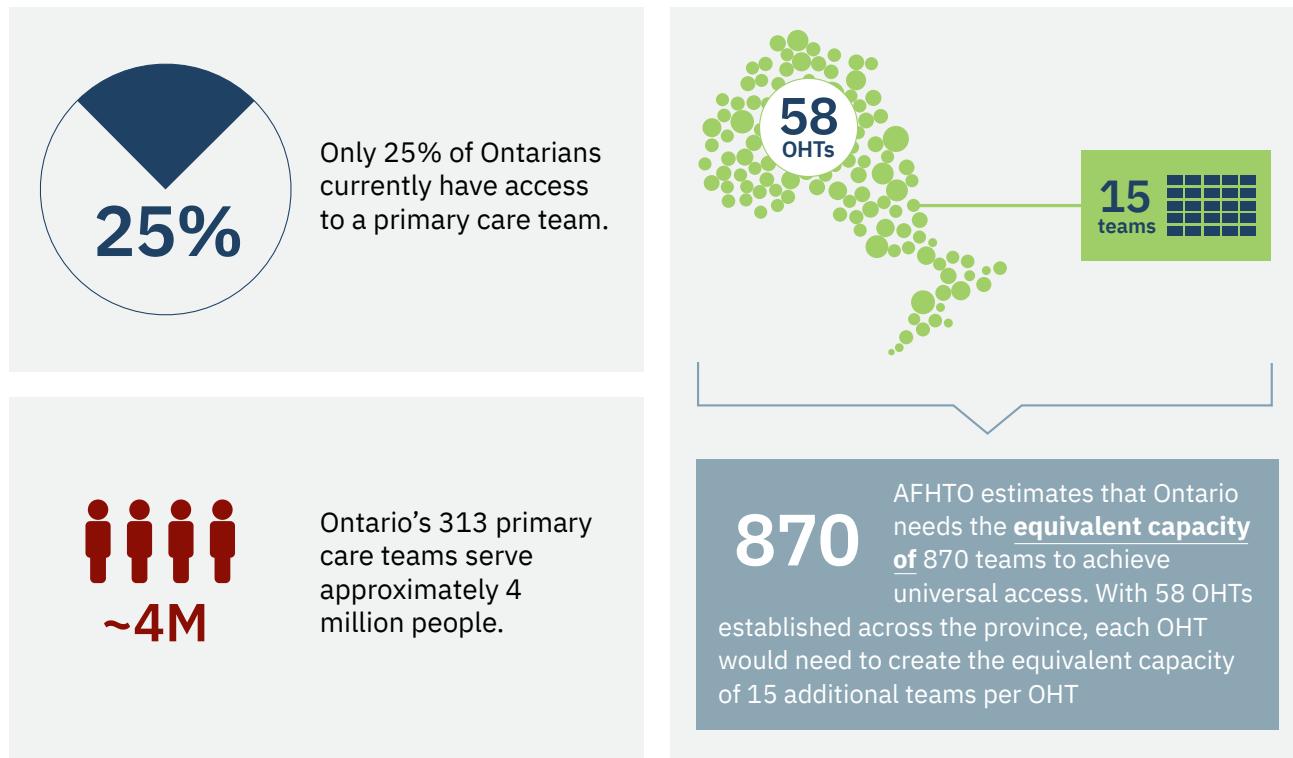
2025 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION



Ontario's healthcare system is at a pivotal point. With over 2.3 million Ontarians currently without regular access to primary care—a number projected to grow to 4.4 million by 2026—the need for a robust, skilled, accessible primary care foundation has never been more urgent. Recent government initiatives, including a \$546 million investment to expand team-based primary care and the expansion of the Learn and Stay Grant to train family doctors in Ontario, reflect positive steps toward addressing this crisis. These investments, while encouraging, represent only part of the solution.

To secure comprehensive, equitable primary care for all Ontarian's, further coordinated actions are necessary to build capacity, ensure long-term workforce stability, and foster collaboration between primary care providers, the Ministry of Health, Ontario Health, and all Ontarians. AFHTO, representing 190 interprofessional primary care teams serving 3.5 million people across Ontario, is committed to leading and supporting initiatives that strengthen and expand team-based care, improve health outcomes, and address disparities in care access and health equity for all Ontarians.

Key facts



This submission outlines AFHTO's recommendations for targeted investments that will fortify Ontario's primary care infrastructure and improve primary care delivery for communities across the province.

To support the vision of attaching all Ontarians to a primary care team, AFHTO proposes the following recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1: Invest Strategically in Targeted Current Team Expansion**
- **Recommendation 2: Strengthen Governance of Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) to Empower Primary Care Networks (PCNs)**
- **Recommendation 3: Address the Health Human Resources (HHR) Crisis**

Recommendation 1

Invest Strategically in Targeted Current Team Expansion

Although recent investments have enabled modest growth in primary care teams, the total demand for team-based care remains unmet, particularly in high-need areas. AFHTO recommends focusing new investments in primary care on regions with significant populations of unattached patients and on expanding existing teams within established models where possible. A critical enabler of site expansion is the development of a mechanism for capital expenditures. Many FHTs are constrained by space and there is simply not enough funding to support signing a bigger lease or buildout.

Flexibility in funding allocations is essential for primary care teams to adapt quickly to support the capital and operating costs required to ensure capacity is increased.

We recommend that the Ministry of Health use a phased approach to ensure well-rounded investment in the sector, starting with investments in areas where there is a clear gap. Strategic team expansion and funding flexibility will empower primary care providers to reach unattached patients, particularly those in underserved communities, and to deliver consistent, high-quality care across Ontario.

Facts and figures



AFHTO estimates that the Ministry of Health funded ~25% of applications of applications for new and expanded teams in 2025. Of the 190 AFHTO members, only 37 teams were successful.

\$900m

AFHTO estimates that there is at least \$900 million investment needed in the next year to attach all Ontarians with a primary care team.

Recommendation 2

Address the Health Human Resources (HHR) Crisis

Ontario's primary care teams are facing a critical shortage of healthcare professionals, driven by increased healthcare demand, challenging working conditions, and wage disparity within the health sector. Community health organizations (including primary care, mental health and addictions agencies, long-term care and home and community care) need at least \$2.5 billion (\$500 million annually for 5 years) to get closer to pay parity with hospitals and other employers.



AFHTO recommends an investment of \$430 million (\$86 million annually for 5 years) to address primary care health human resource (HHR) challenges, ensuring competitive wages, improved recruitment and retention, and equity across the primary care system. AFHTO members collectively need \$227 million (\$45 million annually for five years) to improve recruitment and retention. This funding will help address the pay gap for the team members (e.g., nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, occupational therapists, chiropodists, social workers, dietitians, kinesiologists, pharmacists, leadership and administrative staff).

It is important to keep in mind that this funding is distinct and separate from physician compensation, which is addressed through OMA fee negotiations. The investment in primary care HHR will have positive effects, as community-based care reduces the downstream exacerbations of health outcomes, alternate level of care (ALC rates) and emergency department visits, resulting in long-term cost savings to the healthcare system.

Recommendation 3

Strengthen Governance of Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) to empower Primary Care Networks (PCNs)

To optimize the tapped and untapped benefits of Ontario Health Teams, it is essential to ensure governance structures that ensures balanced representation between primary care and acute care on OHT boards. Primary Care Networks (PCNs) could play a vital role in delivering coordinated, accessible primary care within OHTs, yet lack the decision-making power necessary to drive integrated care planning effectively.

In jurisdictions with similar structures, such as Primary Care Networks (PCNs) in Alberta, the Ontario Health Teams system falls behind in terms of leading the structure. Despite the greater integration across healthcare providers, OHTs remain heavily reliant on physicians to lead the sector, leading to a lack of proportional representation for other allied health professions. In comparison to Alberta PCNs, which has shifted the power dynamic and focused on increasing the role of nurses, allied professionals and primary care leadership. Learning from the Albertan system will reinforce the leadership role of primary care in leading work.

AFHTO recommends using regulations to formalize governance roles within OHTs to give PCNs equal representation with acute care on OHT boards. By empowering the providers of primary care, Ontario can foster a collaborative, responsive healthcare system that prioritizes patient-centered, integrated care at the local level. These networks can also leverage economies of scale to achieve lower overhead costs and strengthen collaboration within OHTs to facilitate a more coordinated and responsive healthcare system.

A stable and supported workforce is foundational to providing equitable, continuous care in the right place, by the right provider, at the right time. By addressing the wage gap and ensuring appropriate compensation, Ontario can build a resilient workforce capable of adapting to local healthcare needs and expanding access to team-based primary care across the province.

Recognizing the Value of Team-Based Primary Care Providers in Ontario

The Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario (AFHTO) is dedicated to advancing team-based primary care across the province. Representing interprofessional healthcare providers, AFHTO advocates for an accessible, equitable, and sustainable primary care system that meets the needs of all Ontarians. Through our commitment to innovation and collaboration, AFHTO supports Ontario's diverse communities in achieving optimal health.

Team-based primary care is essential to building a resilient healthcare system, and attaching all Ontarians to a primary care team should be a top priority for the provincial healthcare system. Primary care teams, which may include family physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, kinesiologists and other specialized healthcare providers, are uniquely positioned to provide coordinated, comprehensive care that meets the diverse needs of Ontario's communities.

Ontario's recent investments in team-based primary care not only strengthens the health of individuals and communities but also alleviates pressure on the broader healthcare system, such as hospital emergency rooms, by ensuring that patients receive timely, appropriate care within the right setting, often avoiding the need to access more urgent and expensive care. Expanding access to team-based care is an investment in a healthier, more sustainable and proactive healthcare system for all Ontarians.

AFHTO's commitment to primary care in Ontario

AFHTO is committed to collaborating with the Ministry of Health to implement these recommendations, taking an active role in helping Ontario build a resilient, inclusive healthcare system that delivers high-quality, equitable, accessible team-based primary care.

Strength in Numbers



AFHTO currently represents 179 family health teams (96% of all FHTs in Ontario) that provide skilled, team based care to 3,491,050 patients in Ontario

Stakeholder Engagement



AFHTO regularly convenes with its members, which include a variety of healthcare providers and administrators with years of experience in the sector.

Data Evaluation



Our connections to a robust membership give us access to rich quantitative and qualitative data, which is used to highlight workforce challenges and evaluate policy impacts.

Partnership on Pilot Programs



AFHTO is ideally positioned to identify and recruit family health teams and healthcare providers to pilot care delivery models and inform evidence-based policies.

Advocacy



AFHTO and its board of directors, through the support of its membership, provide a strong voice for improvements in capacity and efficiency that align with the Ministry's objectives for a robust primary care system.