

CANADA NEEDS

MORE FAMILY DOCTORS

A Look at the Numbers

6,500,000 Canadians do not have access to a family doctor, representing just over 16% of the population.¹ This number continues to rise.

Just how many doctors are there? In 2023, Canada had just over 97,000 doctors for almost 40 million people.² Only half of these were family doctors, each carrying an average workload of 843 patients.³

Access to a family doctor is especially difficult in rural and remote areas: nearly 20% of the Canadian population lives rurally, but only 7% of doctors choose to practice there.⁴

The current shortage means longer wait times, missed diagnoses and added pressure on hospitals and healthcare workers. The shortage has reached a fever pitch, and urgent action is required.

Interconnected Challenges

Over the past 20 years, medical schools have added 3,573 undergraduate medical seats (a 43.6% increase) and 5,370 residency positions (a 66.9% increase)⁵ – but schools are now at, or beyond, capacity.

Provincial governments have jurisdiction over post-secondary education and health care, making consistent, pan-national investments in medical education difficult.

New doctors often graduate with more than \$90,000 in debt.⁶ In some cases, family doctors earn up to 29% less than other specialists, while also carrying clinic costs like rent, supplies and staffing. These pressures turn some students away from family medicine. According to the 2025 match results, only 27.9% of Canadian medical graduates selected Family Medicine as their first choice, down from 31.4% in 2024.⁷

Doctors in rural and remote communities face unique challenges – including isolation, fewer resources, broader scopes of practice, and difficulty accessing specialist support. These conditions contribute to burnout and make recruitment and retention difficult.⁸

Many skilled, internationally trained doctors arrive in Canada ready to help – but face a long licensing process designed to ensure patient safety and uphold standards. This process delays the contribution of skilled physicians to communities in need – adding pressure to an already stretched system.⁹

Retention rates also vary. Some provinces, like Quebec and Ontario, retain over 80% of their medical graduates, while others see more movement.¹⁰ Retention is especially low in some specialties – with just 71% of psychiatry trainees and 82% of family medicine graduates continuing into practice.¹¹

The Time Is Now

Training a new doctor takes time – up to ten years from the first year of school to full practice – and the right supports along the way. Governments must act swiftly to stabilize and adapt the medical training landscape.

Rapid Response

To create more family doctors, provincial and federal governments must collaborate closely to:

- 1** Help medical schools do more of what they do best by investing in more teaching faculty, more training sites, and more physician mentors. Cuts to the medical curriculum or mandatory shortening of program cycles are not the answer.
- 2** Make family medicine a first-choice career again: increase pay rates, provide tax incentives, and facilitate the business case of running a family doctor's office.
- 3** Rapidly scale up programs that have proven results in helping international medical graduates get licensed faster, such as the University of Manitoba's International Medical Graduate (IMG) Programs¹² and New Brunswick's Practice Ready Assessment.¹³
- 4** Expand initiatives that support doctors in rural and remote areas, such as those existing at NOSMU,¹⁴ Simon Fraser University School of Medicine,¹⁵ and through Distributed Medical Education programs.¹⁶ These initiatives help train, recruit, and retain healthcare professionals in underserved regions, addressing the critical need for family doctors in these communities.
- 5** Acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of sponsored trainees – doctors from other countries who come to Canada to study for a short term, at no expense to Canadians – and who contribute more than 2.5 million hours of care each year, adding skills, ideas, and support that help keep our system strong.

The AFMC Can Help

The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada (AFMC) represents all 18 schools of medicine and is the voice of academic medicine in Canada. AFMC strives to achieve excellence in medical education, health research and health equity for the benefit of all Canadians.

AFMC advocates for a stronger health workforce, better funding for health research, and the integration of planetary health in medical education and healthcare delivery. To this end, AFMC is currently leading the creation of a National Health Research Strategy, bringing together leaders from universities, healthcare, and the private sector.

AFMC also calls for increased funding for medical education, more residency training spots, and better working conditions for physicians. It supports innovative training approaches, particularly in family medicine and underserved communities.

AFMC is eager to collaborate with the federal and provincial governments to strengthen Canada's healthcare system and ensure it meets future challenges.

What Can Individuals Do?

Support policies that expand Canada's healthcare workforce, with a focus on family medicine and rural communities. Verify headlines and share accurate data with your local representatives to advocate for increased funding for medical education, more residency spots, and better support for internationally trained doctors to practice in Canada.

Together, We Can Build a Stronger Healthcare Workforce

For more information or to get involved, visit afmc.ca/advocacy or email us at advocacy@afmc.ca:



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