

Town of Whitby

Staff Report

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Report Title: Family Physician Recruitment Update

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: June 12, 2023

Report Number: CAO 17-23

Department(s) Responsible:

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

Submitted by:

Sarah Klein, Director, Strategic Initiatives

**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell, Chief
Administrative Officer**

For additional information, contact:

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1. Recommendation:

1. That Report CAO 17-23 be received for information; and,
2. That Council approve an initial expense of \$20,000 to support the Regional 2023 Family Physician Recruitment Program, funded from Strategic Initiatives operating budget account 799SIN-PS-3990.

2. Highlights:

- As identified in the feedback from the Community Strategic Plan, the attraction and retention of family physicians is a top priority for residents of the Town of Whitby.
- The Town of Whitby is looking to partner with the Region of Durham, Lakeridge Health, and Durham Region municipalities on a Durham Family Physician Program. This would include two focuses:
 - A welcome and settlement program for the students in the Queen's–Lakeridge Health MD Family Physician training program
- The creation of a plan to establish a Family Physician Retention, Recruitment, and Incentive Program
- The cost of these programs is approximately \$215,000 and would be shared by the Region and local municipalities. Whitby's portion would be \$20,000.

3. Background:

The shortage of family physicians is a challenge across Canada, Ontario, Durham Region, and Whitby. The Canada Medical Forum reports that 4.6 million Canadians are without a family physician, and the Ontario College of Family Physicians reports that nearly 15% of Ontarians are without access to a regular family physician. Preliminary data for Durham indicates that there are approximately 366 family physicians in the Region who deliver primary care services, and the average patient roster for a family physician is 1,380. With a regional population of 738,710, it is estimated that there are 230,000 Durham residents without a family doctor practicing in Durham. Some of these individuals may have a family physician outside of Durham. Furthermore, each year over 1,500 babies born in Durham Region are discharged without a primary care physician.

With the recent and anticipated growth in Durham, the supply of family physicians is unable to keep up with current and future demand. The shortage of family physicians impacts the health and well-being of residents and creates capacity issues for emergency and urgent care resulting in overloads and long wait times.

As a part of the development of the Community Strategic Plan, 50% of respondents to the survey identified access to family physicians as a top priority. A focus on family physician attraction is not new to Whitby or Durham, and there have been physician recruitment plans and strategies in the past. However, since this is a nationwide crisis, the approach needs to focus on addressing the root of the problem in the long term and not simply attracting existing family physicians away from other communities. Furthermore, since residents will travel across the Region to access their family physician, a regional approach is recommended.

The Queen's Lakeridge Family Medicine Program has been in place in Durham since 2013. These residents are based in Durham for their 2-year training program with 9 graduates each year. A novel program looking to address the root of the problem is the new Queen's-Lakeridge MD Family Medicine training program which is beginning this Fall. This program will select 20 trainees annually who will complete four years of medical school and then two years of family medicine residency. They will be based at Queen's Regional Medical Campus in Durham Region and trainees will complete their six years of training in our communities.

Other types of attraction programs include marketing, outreach, promotion, direct recruitment, settlement services, local industry support, succession planning support, data analysis and research, and financial incentives and inducements.

4. Discussion:

A regional approach to family physician recruitment is being recommended to look at the immediate and long-term solutions to attract and retain family physicians. This strategy would be in partnership with the Region and all eight lower-tier municipalities and would focus on two scopes of work; one focusing on the immediate opportunity with the Queen's-Lakeridge Health Program and the second on a long-term plan to create a Physician Retention, Recruitment, and Incentive Program. Once financial commitments are received from area municipalities, Regional staff will recommend the project and seek internal approvals to proceed.

Queen's-Lakeridge Health Family Medicine Program

To respond to the immediate opportunity of 20 medical students arriving in Durham this Fall, a support and retention program would be implemented. This program will also include the 18 family medicine residents currently based in Durham. The Queen's-Lakeridge Health Family Medicine Program would include the provision of the following services for one year, beginning this summer:

- Assistance in finding housing and linking with settlement services
- Working with partners to assist spouses in finding jobs locally
- Organizing and hosting a welcome dinner with partners and subsequent individual follow-ups to reinforce that Durham is a welcoming community
- One-on-one meeting to identify individual support requirements and provide an overview and education of the Region
- Assignment of a point-person to assist with navigating Durham as their new home, with quarterly check-ins
- Undertake activities to create connections in the community, including negotiation with local tourism industries for gift certificates or discounts to local attractions

Creating a Plan for a Physician Retention, Recruitment, and Incentive Program

To address the shortage of family physicians through a long-term and sustainable approach, a multi-faceted plan is required. The creation of a plan would be done in partnership with the Region of Durham, local municipalities, Lakeridge Health, local family physicians, businesses, the Association of Realtors, Chambers of Commerce, School Boards, and local post-secondary institutions. The creation of the plan would begin with research, engagement and evaluation of best practices and the unique needs of the Durham Region. A report would be created that would include the following:

- Estimate of the actual number of additional family doctors needed in Durham
- Scan of physician attraction and retention practices across Ontario
- Regulatory impacts
- An evaluation of possible objectives of a program and recommendations related to the delivery of services to medical trainees to retain them post-graduation, retention of practicing family physicians and attraction of family physicians from outside the Durham Region
- An evaluation of services and programs that could be delivered and recommendations related to marketing, outreach and promotion, direct recruitment, settlement services, local industry support, succession planning support, data analysis and research, and financial incentives and inducements
- Resourcing requirements, including staffing, annual operating funding, and capital funding
- An evaluation of governance and structure options, funding sources, and composition of a board or advisory committee

- Program success metrics and outcomes

The Region of Durham would engage a consultant to develop this report which would be completed by Fall 2023.

5. Financial Considerations:

The total estimated cost of the two scopes of work outlined above is \$215,000:

- 1) The Queen's-Lakeridge Health Family Medicine Program is estimated to cost \$175,000, which includes a part-time staff for 12 months and the associated expenses with delivering the program; and
- 2) The estimated cost to develop the Family Physician Retention, Recruitment, and Incentive Program is \$40,000.

These costs would be shared, with the Region covering 50% and the balance being shared amongst the lower-tier municipalities. The Town of Whitby's share would be \$20,000.

It is recommended that the Town's \$20,000 contribution to one-time costs of developing a Physician Retention, Recruitment, and Incentive Program Plan and the Town's 2023 participation in the Queen's-Lakeridge Health Family Medicine Program be funded from the Strategic Initiatives operating budget account 799SIN-PS-3990. The \$20,000 is unbudgeted and will result in a pressure in this operating budget account which will be offset from other 2023 operating surpluses in the department and across the Town. Any ongoing costs from the Physician Retention, Recruitment, and Incentive Program Plan will be included for Council consideration as part of the 2024 and future budgets.

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

As part of the Phase 1 engagement on the Community Strategic Plan, 50% of the 2,200 respondents identified access to family physicians as one of their top five priorities under the Neighbourhoods pillar. As such, family physician recruitment is included in the Community Strategic Plan, and the recommendations within this report outline actions to address this priority.

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

The recommendations within this report have been developed in partnership with the Region of Durham and other partners identified in this report.

8. Strategic Priorities:

Working with partners to increase access to family physicians is one of the Strategic Actions that is being recommended to Council to include in the Community Strategic Plan. This Strategic Action is listed under the Neighbourhoods pillar under the objective of improving community safety, health, and well-being.

9. Attachments:

n/a