

Town of Whitby

Staff Report

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Report Title: Family Physician Recruitment Incentive Partnership Pilot Program

Report to: Council

Date of meeting: July 26, 2023

Report Number: CAO 20-23

Department(s) Responsible:
Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

Submitted by:
Sarah Klein, Director, Strategic Initiatives

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

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1. Recommendation:

1. That Report CAO 20-23 be received for information;
2. That a new 2023 capital project for the Family Physician Recruitment Incentive Partnership Pilot Program, in the amount of \$300,000, be approved with funding from the Long Term Finance Reserve;
3. That to the extent necessary, the Pilot Program be considered a grant in the interests of the municipality under Section 107 of the *Municipal Act*, 2001, S.O. 2001, c.25, as amended; and,
4. That Council authorize staff to enter into a partnership agreement with the Oshawa Clinic Group to attract family physicians to the Whitby Health Centre upon terms satisfactory to the Director, Strategic Initiatives, and the Commissioners of Financial Services/Treasurer and Legal and Enforcement Services/Town Solicitor.

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.
- Through the 2023 participatory budgeting, community members identified physician recruitment as the top priority to invest further tax dollars.
- The Town of Whitby is looking to partner with the Oshawa Clinic Group to develop a Family Physician Recruitment Incentive Partnership Pilot Program that would attract up to 10 family physicians to the new Whitby Health Centre opening in 2024.
- This pilot program would include a \$500,000 incentive equally shared between the Town of Whitby and the Oshawa Clinic Group. This would offer 10 family physicians an incentive of \$50,000 over a five-year term.

3. Background:

In June 2023, through Report CAO 17-23, staff presented a Family Physician Recruitment Update. This Report provided an overview of the need for family physicians in Whitby and approved an initial expense of \$20,000 to support the Regional 2023 Family Physician Recruitment Program, which includes a welcome and settlement program for the students in the Queen's-Lakeridge Health MD Family Physician training program and the creation of a plan to establish a Family Physician Recruitment & Retention Program. This investment and partnership at a Regional level provides a program to address the challenge of a shortage of family physicians through a long-term strategy.

In Report CAO 17-23, it was identified that a deficiency 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.

To address the short-term need, Whitby is presented with an opportunity to partner with the Oshawa Clinic Group to attract family physicians to the new Whitby Health Centre. The Oshawa Clinic Group is Canada's largest multi-disciplinary medical group practice committed to providing leading diagnostic and treatment services and counselling to

patients about lifestyle choices that promote good health. Their goal is to provide a broad range of health care services, which are well-coordinated and easily accessible to the community. They believe that their greatest strength is their physicians and staff, and they strive to maintain an environment which will attract and maintain highly trained and competent individuals, encourage teamwork, personal growth and provide leading-edge health care for our community. Today, the Oshawa Clinic Group is comprised of over 140 physicians across four medical office buildings in Durham Region. The Oshawa Clinic Group will be opening its fifth Durham location in Whitby in Spring 2024. The Whitby Health Centre will be located at 198 Des Newman Blvd and will be a four-storey, 154,000 square foot, state-of-the-art, and fully accessible medical office that will include both family and specialist physicians. The Whitby Health Centre will provide a wide range of health care services to residents, with an anticipated one million patient visits annually.

Family physicians who are a part of the Oshawa Clinic Group are members of a Family Health Organization. This practice model is designed to better coordinate health care for the patients who are rostered to their group of family physicians. The Family Health Organization provides an enhanced range of supportive services that make it easier for doctors to provide accessible, comprehensive primary care to their patients.

4. Discussion:

Staff are recommending that Whitby continue with the Regional partnership to develop a welcome and settlement program as well as a long-term Family Physician Recruitment & Retention Plan. Furthermore, staff are recommending a partnership with the Oshawa Clinic Group to offer an incentive to recruit family physicians to the new Whitby Health Centre as family physicians are the most needed yet hardest to attract physicians for our community. This incentive program is being recommended in advance of the results of the Regional Plan as there will be capacity at the Whitby Health Centre beginning next year for 10 new family physicians, and recruitment for these medical professionals must begin this fall.

This partnership would include a recruitment strategy, the development of attraction profiles and materials, attendance at upcoming job fairs to attract new family physicians to Whitby, and a shared financial incentive to family physicians. This would be developed as a pilot program that could be replicated with other clinics in the future.

The financial incentive would offer \$50,000 per family physician, up to 10 family physicians over a five-year term. This cost would be equally shared between the Town of Whitby and the Oshawa Clinic Group, with each partner contributing \$5,000 annually per physician.

The Family Physician Recruitment Incentive Partnership Pilot Program will focus on the benefits of joining the Oshawa Clinic Group – a well-established, professional, and multi-disciplinary medical group practice which allows physicians to focus on their patients while the Clinic oversees the business and administrative components of the practice. It will also focus on why Whitby is a great place to live, work, and explore and highlight our exceptional parks, recreation, education, culinary sectors, and high quality

of life. It will also feature the opportunity to work at a new, state-of-the-art medical facility that will provide a wide range of healthcare services to residents.

Upon approval of this program, staff will work with the Oshawa Clinic Group to develop an agreement outlining the roles and commitments of each party. The agreement will outline certain preconditions for physician eligibility, including:

- Each physician must work an average of 35 hours per week at the Whitby Health Centre;
- Each physician must have a minimum roster of 400 patients in the first year, 1,000 patients by the third year and maintain this minimum through to the end of the five-year term;
- Payments are to be provided annually, as follows:
 - Only if the physician is employed at the Whitby Health Centre as of December 31 of each year; and,
 - Pro-rated if the physician was not employed at the Whitby Health Centre on January 1 but was employed at the Whitby Health Centre as of December 31, annually.

5. Financial Considerations:

The financial commitment to the Town of Whitby for the Family Physician Recruitment Incentive Partnership Pilot Program would be a total of \$300,000 over five years. This includes the Town's contribution to the financial incentive of \$25,000 per physician for up to 10 family physicians (to be matched by the Oshawa Clinic Group) and \$10,000 per year for operating costs, including but not limited to administrative and registration costs to participate in job fairs (travel, advertising and promotional materials, booth registration, as well as a retention program and events).

It is recommended that a new 2023 capital project, in the amount of \$300,000, for this pilot program be approved, funded from the Long Term Finance Reserve (also known as the "One-Time" reserve). Funding from reserves is appropriate for pilot programs but is not sustainable for on-going programs/services. Accordingly, longer term/on-going programs for physician recruitment and retention may require future property tax funding. As noted earlier in this report, the Town will also be participating in the Regional 2023 Family Physician Recruitment Program to develop a longer term strategy. Implementation of recommendations from the longer term strategy that have financial implications beyond the Town's current programs and services will be subject to Council approval through the Town's annual budget process.

An Economic Development Officer would be assigned to support this program. In 2023, Council approved a one-year contract for a second Economic Development Officer. For the Family Physician Recruitment Incentive Partnership Pilot Program to be successful and to help implement the longer-term strategy and other priorities in the Community Strategic Plan, staff will include the recommendation to make the Economic Development Officer a permanent position in the 2024 budget for Council's approval.

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. Furthermore, as a part of the participatory budgeting launched through the budget engagement over the past month, physician recruitment was identified as the top priority.

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

The recommendations within this report have been developed in partnership with Legal and Financial Services and the Oshawa Clinic Group.

8. Strategic Priorities:

This report directly supports Action 1.1.6 - *Work with partners to increase access to family physicians* in the Community Strategic Plan. This Action is identified under Strategic Pillar 1: Whitby's Neighbourhoods – Safe, Healthy and Inclusive and supports achieving the objective of improving community safety, health and well-being.

9. Attachments:

n/a