



NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

January 18, 2020

Dear (Leadership Candidate),

Our health care system is underperforming. Patient outcomes are poor and patient access to care is a major problem. Patients continue to suffer from wait times and bottlenecks that need solutions. Recruitment and retention of doctors is a fundamental problem in many regions and specialties. Our province retains less than half of the medical students from Memorial University's Faculty of Medicine, the worst record of any province in Canada.

During the 2021 election campaign we ask the political parties to commit to fix the province's most significant access problem and help the 90,000 residents of the province who do not have a family doctor or a primary health care team. Every citizen has an equal right to be attached to a family doctor, yet our system denies them this right. A solution will improve health outcomes for everyone and make the health system more cost-effective.

To date, the government has been on the wrong track. It has not focused on attaching patients to family doctors and building real primary health care teams. Every person needs comprehensive care for potential illness and disease, coordination of their care with other specialized health providers, a doctor who knows their personal health issues and concerns over an extended period of time, advisors on how to prevent disease and live a healthy life, and health care providers who can follow-up on their care after surgery or other stays in a hospital.

The evidence is clear. People who lack access to this type of comprehensive and continuous care are more likely to be admitted to hospital, more likely to use expensive emergency departments, and more likely to be treated by a parade of providers who will need to repeat costly tests to diagnose their conditions. This is an expensive overuse of health resources. These are the conclusions of the Canadian Institute of Health Information.

A study by the Health Quality Council of Alberta shows that patients who see family doctors in a primary health care team will save the health system between \$182 and \$449 per patient, per year, compared to similar patients who are not attached to family doctors in teams.

This type of care is most important for people with chronic diseases and mental health issues who need regular monitoring and adjustments to their care. This province has by far the highest incidence of chronic diseases. Poor access to primary care means poor health outcomes and higher costs. Better primary care and fewer unattached patients are also important for specialists because referrals will come from family doctors who have in-depth knowledge of these patients, and follow-up care will be assured.

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*Representing and supporting a united medical profession and providing leadership
in the provision of excellent health care in Newfoundland and Labrador*

We seek a response that includes your commitment to the following: a province-wide program of primary health care teams where patients receive comprehensive care; where family physicians can transition away from solo practice to team practice; where nurse practitioners, registered nurses and other providers can be connected and integrated with family doctors in team structures; where patients can have a continuous relationship with their own “most responsible provider”; where the progress we have made in electronic medical records and virtual care can be harvested for integrated team care; and where the focus can shift to wellness and disease prevention. As well, we ask you to set goals for reducing the proportion of unattached patients in the province to 5 per cent and retaining 75 per cent of Memorial medical graduates who pursue family medicine.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'L. Powell', is positioned above the typed name.

Lynette Powell, M.D.
President