



**NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

NLMA Meets with Premier on crisis in Rural Health Centres

April 20, 2022

St. John's, NL – Last week NLMA President Dr. Susan MacDonald met with Premier Andrew Furey and the Minister of Health, John Haggie, to discuss the challenge of physician vacancies in rural health centres throughout the province.

“In the meeting with the Premier we put forward recommendations to ‘stop the bleeding’ so that we, first and foremost, do not lose the doctors who still remain at these sites. Then we must focus on ways to create short-term capacity to staff these sites through ‘short stay’ hiring and high-quality virtual care. Finally, to recruit people beyond the short term, we must make these sites competitive with similarly remote sites in Northern Canada,” said Dr. MacDonald.

“We are pleased the Premier and the Minister agreed to evaluate these recommendations for implementation, and we look forward to engaging in more dialogue with the government in the coming days and weeks. Our message to the Premier and Minister of Health is that whatever measures government decides, they have to be meaningful and they have to be done quickly.”

In addition to Central Newfoundland, where the problem of physicians resigning is in crisis proportions, the NLMA told the Premier about additional sites in other regions that will lose doctors currently providing family medicine and emergency services.

The NLMA has confirmed that the last remaining physicians working in the health centres in Flowers Cove and Forteau are leaving. The last doctor in Roddickton has already left the province, and the health centre there is now relying on virtual care for physician services.

The health centres in St. Lawrence and New Wes Valley will be reduced to one physician by this summer. One physician is leaving St. Lawrence by the end of June and two physicians are leaving New Wes Valley by the end of July. One physician in Burgeo has already resigned, leaving one physician remaining in the community. The physician numbers in Bonavista are unstable, with likely departures this spring.

Another physician is leaving the health centre in Whitbourne by the end of May, leaving two physicians to provide emergency coverage in the community’s health centre.

“When health centres that provide emergency coverage are reduced to one or two physicians, the workload becomes unsustainable,” Dr. MacDonald said. “Doctors are forced to be on-call every night or every second night, seven days a week. This leads to poor quality of life and burnout. When they do not have the support of a full complement of physicians they often leave, and we are seeing this across the province right now.”

Last week, the NLMA reported that the last physician has left the health centre in St. Alban’s and that the last remaining physicians at the health centres in Harbour Breton, Buchans, Baie Verte and Fogo will be gone by the end of June.

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