

Subject: Primary Care Provider Recruitment and Retention Strategy

File Number : ACS2025-SI-SPO-0003

Report to Finance and Corporate Services Committee on 14 October 2025

and Council 22 October 2025

Submitted on October 2, 2025 by Debbie Stewart, General Manager, Strategic Initiatives Department

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Ward: Citywide

Objet: Stratégie de recrutement et de maintien en poste de fournisseurs de soins primaires

Numéro de dossier : ACS2025-SI-SPO-0003

Rapport présenté au Comité des finances et des services organisationnels le 14 octobre 2025

et au Conseil le 22 octobre 2025

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REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Finance and Corporate Services Committee recommend that Council approve the Primary Care Strategy described in this report.

RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT

Que le Comité des finances et des services organisationnels recommande au Conseil d'approuver la Stratégie des soins primaires décrite dans le présent rapport.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ontario faces a growing shortage of primary care providers, with 2.5 million residents currently unattached¹ to a physician or primary care provider and projections of over 4 million unattached residents by 2026². Nationally, 6.5 million Canadians lack access to a primary care provider³. In Ottawa, at least 165,362 residents were without a provider in 2022⁴, a number that has risen, with marginalized groups disproportionately affected. Estimates from the primary care sector suggest Ottawa needs 270 new primary care providers, not including pending retirements.

While health care is provincially managed, access to primary care affects Ottawa's livability, economic growth, and ability to attract new residents. Municipalities across Ontario are responding to the health care crisis with their own recruitment and retention initiatives to address the issue within their communities. In April 2025, City Council directed staff to review best practices, consult stakeholders, and recommend a strategy.

Findings show smaller, remote, and rural communities often use financial incentives to attract physicians, however this practice is prohibited by the Ontario Municipal Act, 2001 which prevents municipalities from offering such supports to for-profit providers.

Existing provincial policies disadvantage Ottawa by barring International Medical

¹ Ontario College of Family Physicians, July 11, 2024. [New Data Shows There Are Now 2.5 Million Ontarians Without a Family Doctor - Ontario College of Family Physicians | Ontario College of Family Physicians](#)

² Ontario College of Family Physicians, November 7, 2023. [More Than Four Million Ontarians Will Be Without a Family Doctor by 2026 - Ontario College of Family Physicians | Ontario College of Family Physicians](#)

³ Ariyana Gomes, Heather Gillis. CBC News, Feb. 25, 2025. [Canadians need doctors. These strategies from around the country aim to find them | CBC News](#)

⁴ The Annals of Family Medicine November 2024, 22 (Supplement 1) 6435, Sydney Persaud, Monica Armstrong, Clare Liddy, Vera Etches, Claire Kendall and Kady Carr. [Geospatial analysis of neighbourhood-level primary care attachment in Ottawa, Canada | Annals of Family Medicine](#)

Graduates from practicing here for five years, and by limiting physician partnerships beyond 5 kilometers, which is a greater hindrance for larger geographical communities like Ottawa and disadvantages Ottawa's rural communities disproportionately. Despite Ottawa's strong quality of life, these systemic barriers, along with national shortages, negatively impact the number of primary care providers practicing in our city.

Staff consulted with primary care experts to create a strategy and action plan that supports, influences, and builds partnerships with those operating within the primary care space. This report summarizes the root causes of the primary care crisis, what is being done by other municipalities and Ontario Health to mitigate the situation, and outlines an action plan that will strengthen Ottawa's position to attract and retain primary care providers and improve residents' access to essential health services, by delivering the following:

1. **Create a Primary Care Recruitment & Retention Ambassador position within the Strategic Projects Office, Strategic Initiatives Department, for a two-year pilot period**, including an annual budget of \$40,000 to support EOPRA membership fees, conference participation, and event-related recruitment activities. Temporary funding is available to support both the position and the program costs for the duration of the pilot, after which alternative funding options will be reviewed to determine continuation.
2. **Join the Eastern Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance (EOPRA).** Membership within EOPRA allows the City to leverage a network of resources and expertise necessary to advance Ottawa's primary care recruitment objectives.
3. **Advocate to the Province** for policy changes that will remove barriers to physician recruitment in Ottawa, such as the five-year restriction on International Medical Graduates practicing in Ottawa and the five-kilometre limit for Family Health Organization membership.
4. **Contribute to the development of non-profit medical clinics by exploring** opportunities to contribute land or space for the creation of new or expanded non-profit medical centres in underserved areas.
5. **Develop a centralized database** in coordination with primary care providers to catalogue and publicize physician and nurse practitioner vacancies in Ottawa to help candidates find and apply for full-time, part-time, and locum positions.

6. **Design and implement a targeted recruitment plan** that targets medical school and residency programs, nurse practitioner programs, as well as local, provincial, and international recruitment fairs. Showcasing Ottawa as an attractive destination for practicing comprehensive family medicine, including accessible relocation and practice specific resources for prospective physicians, with the goal of retaining local medical residents and graduates, and attracting candidates from other regions, as well as recruiting foreign-trained doctors and other qualified practitioners.
7. **Assist physicians in preparing proposals and navigating the Ontario Health application process** to expand or establish new Family Health Organizations, Family Health Teams, Family Health Networks, and Family Health Groups in priority communities, with the goal of improving access to primary care in underserved areas.
8. **Undertake a review to streamline internal and external facing City administrative policies and employee benefits that require consultation with primary care providers** with the aim of reducing reliance on primary care providers for the fulfillment of City administrative processes.
9. **Collaborate with Ottawa Public Health to identify ways to improve residents' access to primary care** to help ensure equitable service for priority populations including but not limited to; immigrants, racialized communities, 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, and people experiencing homelessness.
10. **Identify partnership opportunities between City of Ottawa departments and the primary care sector:** Identify opportunities for City departments such as Paramedics, Ottawa Public Health, and Community and Social Services to collaborate with Ontario Health–funded non-profit organizations to deliver existing services in ways that support primary care, ease demand on providers, and increase capacity to accept more patients.

RÉSUMÉ

L'Ontario fait face à une pénurie de fournisseurs de soins primaires, avec 2,5 millions de résidents actuellement non liés à un médecin de famille¹ ou à un autre fournisseur de soins primaires, ainsi qu'à des prévisions de plus de 4 millions de résidents non liés d'ici 2026². À l'échelle nationale, 6,5 millions de Canadiens manquent d'accès à un fournisseur de soins primaires³. À Ottawa, au moins 165 362 résidents n'avaient pas de fournisseur en 2022⁴, un nombre qui a augmenté, et qui comprend des groupes

marginalisés touchés de manière disproportionnée. Les estimations du secteur des soins primaires, sans compter les prochains départs à la retraite, suggèrent qu'Ottawa a besoin de 270 nouveaux fournisseurs de soins primaires.

Même si les soins de santé sont gérés par le gouvernement provincial, l'accès aux soins primaires touche la qualité de vie et la croissance économique d'Ottawa, ainsi que sa capacité à attirer de nouveaux résidents. Des municipalités partout en Ontario donnent suite à la crise des soins de santé avec leurs propres initiatives de recrutement et de maintien en poste pour régler le problème au sein de leurs communautés. En avril 2025, le Conseil municipal a demandé au personnel de passer en revue des pratiques exemplaires, de consulter des parties prenantes et de recommander une stratégie.

Les constatations révèlent que les communautés plus petites, rurales et éloignées utilisent souvent des incitatifs financiers pour attirer des médecins. Cependant, ce procédé est interdit par la *Loi sur les municipalités*, L. O. 2001, et empêche les municipalités d'offrir de tels soutiens à des fournisseurs à but lucratif.

Les politiques provinciales existantes désavantagent Ottawa en empêchant les diplômés internationaux en médecine d'exercer ici pendant cinq ans et en limitant les partenariats entre médecins au-delà de 5 kilomètres, ce qui constitue un plus grand obstacle pour les communautés géographiques les plus étendues, comme Ottawa, et pénalise de façon disproportionnée les communautés rurales. Malgré l'excellente qualité de vie d'Ottawa, ces obstacles systémiques combinés aux pénuries nationales ont des répercussions négatives sur le nombre de fournisseurs de soins primaires en pratique dans notre ville.

Le personnel a consulté des experts en soins primaires afin de concevoir une stratégie et un plan d'action qui appuient, influencent et bâtissent des partenariats avec ceux qui exercent leurs activités dans le cadre des soins primaires. Le présent rapport résume les causes profondes de la crise des soins primaires, ce qui est fait par d'autres municipalités et Santé Ontario pour remédier à la situation, et décrit un plan d'action qui solidifiera le positionnement d'Ottawa en vue d'attirer et de maintenir en poste des fournisseurs de soins primaires et d'améliorer l'accès des résidents à des services de santé essentiels, en s'acquittant de ce qui suit:

- 1. Créer un poste d'ambassadeur du recrutement et du maintien en poste de fournisseurs de soins primaires au sein du Bureau des projets stratégiques de la Direction générale des initiatives stratégiques pour un projet pilote**

d'une durée de deux ans, et y allouer un budget annuel de 40 000 \$ afin de financer les droits d'adhésion à l'Alliance de recrutement de médecins de l'Est ontarien (EOPRA), les frais de participation à des conférences et les activités de recrutement en lien avec ces événements. Un financement temporaire est disponible pour appuyer la création du poste et les coûts du programme pour la durée du projet pilote, après quoi d'autres options de financement seront étudiées pour déterminer le maintien du poste.

2. **Se joindre à l'Alliance de recrutement de médecins de l'Est ontarien (EOPRA). L'adhésion à l'EOPRA permet à la Ville de** mettre à profit un réseau de ressources et d'expertise nécessaire pour faire progresser les objectifs de recrutement de fournisseurs de soins primaires d'Ottawa.
3. **Revendiquer auprès de la province** des changements de politique en vue d'éliminer les obstacles au recrutement de médecins à Ottawa, comme la restriction de cinq ans empêchant les diplômés internationaux en médecine d'exercer ici et la limite de cinq kilomètres pour l'affiliation à un organisme de santé familiale.
4. **Contribuer au développement de cliniques médicales à but non lucratif en explorant** des possibilités d'offrir des terrains ou des espaces pour la création ou l'expansion de centres médicaux sans but lucratif dans des secteurs mal desservis.
5. **Développer une base de données centralisée** en coordination avec des fournisseurs de soins primaires pour cataloguer et publiciser les offres d'emploi de médecins et de personnel infirmier praticien à Ottawa pour permettre aux candidats de trouver des postes à temps plein, à temps partiel et de suppléance et de postuler.
6. **Concevoir et mettre en œuvre un plan ciblé de recrutement** visant les facultés de médecine et les programmes de résidence, les programmes d'infirmières et infirmiers praticiens, ainsi que les salons de l'emploi locaux, provinciaux et internationaux. Présenter Ottawa en tant que destination attrayante pour exercer une médecine familiale complète, incluant une relocalisation accessible et des ressources particulières d'exercice pour les médecins, l'objectif consistant à retenir les résidents et diplômés médicaux locaux et à attirer des candidats d'autres régions, ainsi que de recruter des médecins formés à l'étranger et d'autres omnipraticiens qualifiés.

7. **Aider les médecins à préparer des propositions et à s'orienter dans le processus de demande de Santé Ontario** pour étendre un organisme de médecine familiale ou en établir un nouveau, pour créer des équipes de santé familiale, des réseaux et des groupes de santé familiale dans des communautés prioritaires, avec l'objectif d'améliorer l'accès aux soins primaires dans des zones mal desservies.
8. **Entreprendre un examen pour simplifier les politiques administratives internes et externes de la Ville ainsi que les avantages sociaux des employés qui nécessitent la participation des fournisseurs de soins primaires** dans l'objectif d'avoir de moins en moins recours à ces derniers pour mener à bien les processus administratifs de la Ville.
9. **Collaborer avec Santé publique Ottawa pour cerner des façons d'améliorer l'accès des résidents aux soins primaires** et permettre d'assurer un service équitable pour les populations prioritaires, y compris notamment : les immigrants, les communautés racialisées, les personnes 2SLGBTQQIA+ et les personnes en situation d'itinérance.
10. **Définir des possibilités de partenariat entre les directions générales de la Ville d'Ottawa et le secteur des soins primaires:** identifier des possibilités pour des directions générales de la Ville, comme les paramédics, Santé publique Ottawa et les Services sociaux et communautaires de collaborer avec des organismes à but non lucratif financés par Santé Ontario pour offrir les services existants de manière à appuyer les soins primaires, à les faciliter et à accroître la capacité d'accepter davantage de patients.

BACKGROUND

Currently there are more than 2.5 million people in Ontario who do not have a family doctor, the Ontario College of Family Physicians predicts that number will increase to more than 4 million by 2026. The shortage of family doctors is not only an Ontario concern, as it's also estimated that 6.5 million Canadians are currently without access to a family doctor. The City of Ottawa is just one of many municipalities within Ontario, and Canada that are concerned with the shortage of primary care providers for their residents. Strong cities are dependent on their ability to meet the health needs of its existing and growing populations, without access to enough primary care providers a city is at risk of losing jobs and residents to other communities, in addition to experiencing a health care crisis among its existing residents.

Recognizing the family doctor shortage is nearing a crisis, more municipalities throughout Ontario and other provinces are taking action to improve outcomes for their communities. Although the Province of Ontario is implementing changes that will have a positive impact on the number of primary care providers entering the public health system, the concern is that these initiatives will be slow to stop the current momentum, as other factors continue to influence the ongoing shortages. These include population growth, a retirement wave of existing family doctors, restrictive funding models, shifts away from comprehensive practice and growth in focused care such as sports medicine, pain specialists and hospitalists, and generational changes in work-life balance among doctors, which will continue to drive shortages in primary care.

Through Ontario's Primary Care Action Plan, the Province is investing \$2.1B into health care with the goal of attaching every resident with a primary care provider by 2029. Ongoing initiatives include new medical schools and residency programs for doctors, additional Nurse Practitioner training positions, streamlined programs for foreign trained doctors and the creation of up to 80 new primary care teams. Despite these encouraging activities, many municipalities are increasing or onboarding physician recruitment programs to capitalize on the upcoming increase in supply of primary care providers, as there is still a need to attract those limited resources to their communities, otherwise they risk worsening an already dire situation as existing physicians leave practice or retire, leaving even more residents without access to a primary care provider.

For the City of Ottawa, that concern has reached a peak as more residents are unable to find a primary care provider, and with no immediate relief in sight, the number of unattached residents is expected to rise. The current number of residents without a primary care provider is unknown, although in 2022, it was reported that 165,362 Ottawa residents were unattached, a number believed to have grown significantly since then. It is also recognized that marginalized populations in our community are disproportionately affected, experiencing higher rates of unattachment. While it is difficult to know exactly how many new providers are needed to close the gap, as capacity varies by clinician, the current estimates suggest Ottawa has a shortage of approximately 270 practicing family care providers, not accounting for ongoing retirements.

DISCUSSION

On April 16, 2025, [motion 2025-56-15](#) was passed at City Council directing staff to undertake the following:

- Scan measures other Ontario municipalities were undertaking to address a shortage in primary care providers
- Engage in discussions with the Eastern Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance
- Engage healthcare, postsecondary institutions, relevant professional associations and other City departments
- Report back to Council with short- and long-term recommendations for a Primary Care Provider Recruitment and Retention Strategy

The strategy and action plan provided in this report are the result of that direction and represent how the City can mitigate the overall shortage of primary care providers by promoting the City of Ottawa as a desirable community to practice comprehensive family medicine, advocate to the provincial government to eliminate barriers and make choosing to practice comprehensive family medicine in Ottawa easier, facilitate the delivery of health care through partnerships and relationship building among the diverse participants within the primary care space, and reduce the administrative burden on primary care providers so that they can concentrate on meeting the health needs of patients.

In recent years, artificial intelligence tools have markedly enhanced the capacity of primary care physicians across Ontario by reducing administrative burden, increasing efficiency, and freeing up time for patient care. These gains have helped mitigate physician burnout and enabled more consistent, timely attention to patients; however, these capacity gains will not be sufficient to address the primary care crisis in Ontario.

Analysis/Environmental Scan

Ottawa Public Health conducted an environmental scan in Spring 2025 of the measures being implemented by other municipalities within Ontario and Canada to attract and retain physicians in their communities. Historically, rural and remote communities have relied heavily on financial incentives to attract physicians to their communities and this approach has significantly increased in recent years with medium-sized municipalities also taking up the practice of providing signing bonuses and other financial rewards for contractual return of service agreements with doctors willing to locate to their

communities. Larger municipalities (those within the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area) have refrained from using financial incentives to recruit primary care providers. However, individual business owners of medical clinics within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) have advertised signing bonuses as a recruitment tool to fill out their own rosters.

Incentive programs operated by municipal governments are not without controversy, as it pits municipalities against each other and the municipality offering the most money usually wins. The use of incentives is a practical approach for small, rural and remote communities that require only a few providers and would not see a natural migration of sufficient physicians to their community. On the other hand, the City of Ottawa has a strong population growth with a high quality of life including access to post secondary institutions, medical school, parks, green space, walkability/bikeability, restaurants, professional sports, and entertainment. The City's shortage of primary care providers is not a result of the city's liveability – rather it is a result of the overall shortage of primary care providers in Canada.

In addition, the Ontario Municipal Act, 2001 prohibits providing funding or other advantages to select business owners over other business owners in the community. The ability to proceed with these incentives in smaller communities might rest with the collective will of the entire community to overlook these practices for the good of the community, with existing doctors also benefiting from attracting additional doctors to their communities that could lighten their patient loads, assist with emergency care access, and create opportunities for retirements for older physicians in the community.

As physicians and owners of for-profit clinics, primary care providers represent a business and are therefore prohibited from receiving a bonus of any kind from the municipality if that same bonus is not offered to all similar businesses. The City of Ottawa would be in contravention of the Ontario Municipal Act, 2001 if select for-profit business owners or individual physicians were provided with a financial incentive or reduced or free public land/clinic space, while others were not. The City however can engage and provide support to clinics operating as non-profits funded through Ontario Health, including Community Health Centres, Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics and Family Health Teams. There are currently six Community Health Centres, one Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic and 10 Family Health Teams operating within the city. Under Ontario's Primary Care Action Plan, opportunities exist for more non-profit clinics to be funded, and the City can support those proposals by providing free or reduced-price land, free or reduced-price space in existing or future City facilities, or funding to support capital costs.

For example, the City is in discussions with the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Ottawa to identify opportunities to assist in the replacement of resident physician teaching facilities that have reached end of life or have outgrown their clinic space. One of the Department's current teaching sites will no longer be functional by 2028, and if no replacement is found, would leave 50 resident physicians without a place to complete their educational requirements and also eliminate primary care access for approximately 20,000 residents who receive care through this location.

The loss of facilities to house the teaching clinic would not only significantly reduce the number of patients currently receiving care through the Department of Family Medicine; it would also reduce the number of physician graduates, some of whom choose to remain in our community and set up comprehensive family medicine practices. Assisting with the relocation of teaching facilities not only secures primary care access for those currently receiving services through these institutions; it also maintains a key pipeline of new graduates who many choose to stay in Ottawa and set up practice, creating even more capacity for local residents.

Eastern Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance

The Eastern Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance (EOPRA) is a membership organization consisting of 16 Eastern Ontario communities, each with their own recruitment strategy, united on the common goal of improved primary care access for residents. The alliance allows communities to leverage shared efforts and focus on attracting physicians abroad (US, UK, Ireland) through collective tools and event coordination. The EOPRA is one of five regional alliances operated under the Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance (OPRA).

City staff have engaged in discussions with both EOPRA and OPRA regarding membership benefits, enrollment, and primary care provider recruitment strategies within municipalities. Membership eligibility is based solely on an organization's commitment to engage in primary care provider recruitment and its willingness to share tools and resources within the alliance. EOPRA's annual membership fees for 2026 are anticipated to be approximately \$5,000.

Engagement

In response to the direction of Motion 2025-56-15, twenty-six (26) subject matter experts were consulted to inform on this strategy and action plan. Meetings were conducted with physicians, Ottawa's three Ontario Health Teams, medical school administrators, researchers, hospital administrators, Executive Directors of non-profit

health centres and clinics, Nurse Practitioners and educators, Ontario Health staff, physician recruitment experts, professional associations, health care activists and for-profit health clinic staff. The consensus from those consulted was that there is a need and place for the City of Ottawa to engage in the primary care space and physician recruitment for the betterment of the city and its residents.

Ottawa's Uniqueness

A prevalent belief among the city's primary care participants is that Ottawa has been unfairly treated for decades due to provincial practices and policies that have erroneously presumed that the City of Ottawa was not an underserved area for comprehensive family medicine. This misclassification was and continues to be the reasoning for a single restriction that could have significant improvements for our community if removed. The provincial government requires International Medical Graduates (IMGs) that participate in Ontario Residency programs to sign a Return-of-Service Agreement that specifically prevents them from practicing medicine in the City of Ottawa and the Toronto area for a period of five years. This restriction is intended to direct these new physicians to set up practices in smaller, rural and remote communities that are presumably in need of physicians and ignores the reality that the city is also in need of primary care providers, and due to its vast geography, contains many rural villages.

Furthermore, some of Ottawa's rural communities have only a single full-time physician and therefore are more susceptible to retirements and other life changes that could leave an entire community without a primary care provider. Existing provincial limitations on how close Family Health Organization partnering physicians must be located is a significant obstacle to improving primary care in Ottawa's rural communities. It has a similar effect in many urban neighbourhoods, as it prevents partnerships between providers more than five kilometers apart. For example, a resident group in Metcalfe, one of the communities with only a single full-time physician, have approached a Family Health Organization currently operating in the neighbouring community of Osgoode and requested that the clinic expand to Metcalfe. Since the distance between the two communities exceeds the 5-kilometer limit, an exemption must be requested from the provincial government before the partnership can proceed. Advocacy for policy changes at the Provincial level could bring significant improvements to primary care access for Ottawa's urban and rural communities.

Primary Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy

Subject to Council's approval of this report, the following actions will be undertaken to improve primary care in Ottawa.

Action 1: Create a Primary Care Recruitment & Retention Ambassador position within the Strategic Projects Office, Strategic Initiatives Department, for a two-year pilot period, including an annual budget of \$40,000.

The ability to advance the Primary Care Provider Recruitment and Retention Strategy relies heavily on the ability to have a designated resource who is equipped with the understanding and knowledge of the primary care environment and can be dedicated to the delivery of the action plan. Many Ontario municipalities play a role in physician recruitment, and within the central and eastern parts of the province, there are 55 communities that are part of their regional recruitment association. Research identified that individuals who have the role to deliver on the recruitment and retention of primary care providers within their community are either full-time dedicated to this initiative, or it represents 50% of their workload. Considering the effort required to start-up this initiative, deliver on the action items and the urgency of action, a full-time role is recommended.

The City of Hamilton has had significant success in physician recruitment for their community and recently expanded their efforts by adding a second full-time employee to their team. In recent years, Hamilton has added over 35 permanent physicians to their community and 35 locums to cover temporary absences.

Allocating \$40,000 in program funding will enable the delivery of Action items 2, 5, 6 and 7, which are instrumental in the recruitment of new primary care providers.

Temporary funding exists to support both this position and the program costs for a two-year pilot period. A pilot of two-years would allow the City to immediately advance on these important action items, while giving the City time to consider long-term funding models for this position after the two-year period.

Staff intend to report back to Council at the conclusion of the two-year pilot period. The progress report will include a review of key actions and measurable impacts and will include a recommendation as to whether the position should be extended. The progress

report will also assess whether the Action Plan remains aligned with needs and priorities. If the recommendation is to extend the role, staff may recommend adjustments or additional actions to ensure the Action Plan continues to reduce barriers and deliver results.

Action 2: Join the Eastern Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance (EOPRA)

Engaging with the Eastern Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance (EOPRA) was a key direction of Motion 2025-56-15. Joining EOPRA will provide the City with the support and resources to implement recruitment processes that leverage best practices. A condition of joining the Eastern Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance is that the organization joining must participate in physician recruitment and therefore can contribute and benefit from shared practices, contacts and recruitment strategies. This requirement would be satisfied through the approval of the action plan described in this report.

Action 3: Advocate to the Province for policy changes that will remove barriers to physician recruitment in Ottawa

Existing provincial policies limit which physicians may practice in Ottawa, govern how both new and existing physicians are compensated, and restrict how clinic affiliations can be formed. While the five-year restriction on International Medical Graduates (IMGs) is unique to Ottawa and the GTA, other provincial policies also create challenges that disproportionately affect our city. Successfully advocating for the removal of these barriers, both Ottawa-specific and province-wide, could lead to an immediate increase in the number of practicing physicians. In particular, allowing foreign-trained doctors to begin practicing in Ottawa upon receiving provincial accreditation would not only expand capacity but also enhance cultural and linguistic diversity within the primary care workforce, which can strengthen trust and improve the physician–patient relationship within our multicultural population.

Action 4: Contribute to the development of non-profit medical clinics

Examine opportunities to support non-profit medical organizations with land, space, or capital costs to facilitate the creation of medical clinics in underserved areas. City contributions not only help address service gaps but also strengthen funding proposals to Ontario Health, as provincial funding sources recognize municipal support as a significant factor in successful allocations.

Action 5: Develop a centralized database

Working with the primary care sector, staff will develop and maintain a centralized database to catalogue and publicize physician and nurse practitioner vacancies in Ottawa. The ability to centralize all vacancies will help candidates find and apply for full-time, part-time, and locum positions within the city, while at the same time providing the City with critical data on the volume and geographic distribution of primary care vacancies. Although the University of Ottawa Department of Family Medicine provides space on their website for the posting of physician vacancies within the greater Ottawa area, there is still a need for more comprehensive, accurate and timely information, including postings for Nurse Practitioners.

Action 6: Design and implement a targeted recruitment plan

Recent accreditation changes in Canada and Ontario have created a fast pathway for select Foreign Trained Doctors (FTD) to practice primary care in the province, and medical providers from the United States (U.S.) have gained an even easier path to begin practicing in Ontario. These changes, along with the current geopolitical environment that has made Canada a preferred destination for U.S. and international graduates and FTDs, have created a wave of recruitment opportunities that the City can capitalize on. Developing a targeted recruitment plan to leverage the interest to relocate to Canada and Ontario, could lead to immediate and significant results for our community.

To date, the City's absence from primary care recruitment has meant that we have not capitalized on even local opportunities such as partnerships with the University of Ottawa Faculty of Medicine residency programs, University of Ottawa nurse practitioner programs, and participation in provincial medical school recruitment fairs. Other municipalities and governments have routinely attended at the University of Ottawa to recruit graduating physicians away from Ottawa to other communities.

The Faculty of Medicine has implemented changes within their program that now sets a target of 60% of their incoming medical students now originate from the Ottawa area. This, along with a recently successful application to increase the number of residents by 30 students per year, means that there will be more graduating doctors in the years to come, many with local roots. Capitalizing on these factors could significantly increase the number of graduating physicians who remain in Ottawa to set-up practice.

The goal of a targeted recruitment plan is to retain local medical residents and graduates while also capitalizing on U.S. and international recruitment trends to attract qualified practitioners committed to practice comprehensive family medicine in Ottawa.

Action 7: Assist physicians in preparing proposals and navigating the Ontario Health application process

Medical schools and residency programs do little to prepare graduates with the skills necessary to navigate the bureaucratic processes involved in preparing applications and proposals for government consideration and action. Assisting practitioners with navigating and completing the provincial application process to expand or establish new Family Health Organizations, Family Health Teams, Family Health Networks, and Family Health Groups would allow the City to direct efforts to new or expanded clinics in priority communities, with the goal of improving access to primary care in underserved areas.

It should be noted that during the recent annual Association of Municipalities conference, the Ontario Medical Association identified this need as a high priority item within their membership.

Action 8: Undertake a review to streamline internal and external facing City administrative policies and employee benefits that require consultation with primary care providers

A review will be undertaken to identify and assess existing internal and external administrative policies to look for opportunities to reduce or eliminate reliance on primary care providers that are consulted as a condition for the fulfillment of City Human Resources management, employee benefits, or for eligibility of City services such as ParaTranspo. The intended outcome of this review is to ease demand on providers and increase capacity for them to accept more patients.

Action 9: Collaborate with Ottawa Public Health to identify ways to improve residents' access to primary care

Research shows that equity denied groups, including but not limited to, residents who are low income, racialized, recent immigrants, unsheltered and members of the 2SLGBTQQA+ community, are disproportionately unattached to a primary care provider. Ottawa Public Health collaborates with Ottawa's three Ontario Health Teams (OHT), and through the OHTs new initiatives have been identified to overcome these biases.

City staff will work with the OHTs through Ottawa Public Health to assist where necessary to ensure equitable access to primary care providers for all residents.

Action 10: Pursue partnerships between City of Ottawa departments and the primary care sector

Identify opportunities for City departments such as Paramedics, Ottawa Public Health, and Community and Social Services to collaborate with Ontario Health–funded non-profit organizations to deliver existing services in ways that support primary care and ease demand on providers. The City currently delivers on several initiatives that intersect with primary care including, vaccination services, the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan and paramedicine.

For example, Ottawa Paramedic Services is currently engaged with a Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic to implement a preventive healthcare initiative that will see paramedics conduct intake appointments, deliver diagnostic and supportive care to patients including older adults, pediatrics, and infants, and offer urgent and same-day appointments for rostered patients.

Exploring new ways to collaborate with primary care providers could alleviate existing pressures on the sector and increase capacity to accept more patients.

Ongoing Work

The Provincial Primary Care Action Plan is not a static plan; new initiatives, funding opportunities and policy changes are being unveiled by the Province, as the government moves forward on achieving their goal of increasing primary care attachment. The City can improve outcomes for our residents by monitoring the activities associated with the plan and responding quickly to new opportunities to participate in initiatives that enhance primary care outcomes for our residents.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding is available from within existing resources to support the two-year pilot, including a two-year temporary resource and \$40,000 in program costs.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to approving the recommendations in this report.

COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR(S)

This is a City-wide report – not applicable.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE(S) COMMENTS

There are no advisory committee comments associated with this report.

CONSULTATION

No public consultation was undertaken related to the matters of this report.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

No consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee was required in relation to this report.

ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no asset management implications associated with the recommendations of this report.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

There is no direct impact on the 2023–2026 Term of Council Priorities. However, the recommendations outlined in this report supports Council Priority: *A city that has affordable housing and is more liveable for all.*

DISPOSITION

Upon approval of the report by Council, staff from Strategic Initiatives Department, Strategic Projects Office Branch will carry out the Primary Care Provider Recruitment and Retention Strategy in collaboration with any internal and external partners.

**Note: A Minor correction was made to this report further to the City Clerk's Delegated Authority, as set out in Schedule C, Section 8 of Delegation of Authority By-Law 2024-265 to correct some language in the Executive Summary and on page 15 of the report with respect to Action 6.*