

## **Background: Family Doctor Shortage in Kitchener, Cambridge and Waterloo Region**

New research conducted by INSPIRE-PHC<sup>1</sup> shows that as of March 2022, 2.2 million Ontarians were without a regular family doctor, an increase from the 1.8 million in March 2020.

New data shows that at least 64,900 are without a family doctor in the Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge areas compared with 58,100 in 2020. This suggests at least 6,800 people lost their family doctor in the last two years.

Within this area there are two Ontario Health Teams (OHTs); the KW4 OHT and the Cambridge North Dumfries OHT. The latest number of patients without a family doctor is an underestimate as data is unavailable for patients who were born in or who moved to the area after 2019.

The KW4 Ontario Health Team, which includes people living in Kitchener, Waterloo, Wellesley, Wilmot, Woolwich has a patient population of 387,572 and the number of patients without a family doctor has increased from 47,905 in 2020 to 50,118 in 2022.

Within this population, 13,163 of the lowest income earners and 9,744 of those who live in racialized communities do not have a family doctor. Additionally, more than 6,000 people suffering from mental illness and nearly 2,500 who are living with diabetes also do not have a family doctor.

In the Cambridge North Dumfries Ontario Health Team, with a population of 146,241, the number of patients without a family doctor increased from 10,263 in 2020 to 14,780 in 2022. Vulnerable people without a family doctor include 3,260 of the lowest income earners, 1,719 who live in racialized communities, 1,750 with mental illness and nearly 750 with diabetes.

Based on [2019 data](#) that showed 1.7 million Ontarians have a family doctor poised to retire, along with the current data, over 3 million Ontarians may be without a family doctor by 2025.

Family doctors may also leave family practice before retirement age to practice other, more specialized types of medicine that are perceived to be less stressful or more flexible. Overall, the [proportion of family physicians in family practice](#) went from 77.2 per cent in 2008 to 70.7 per cent in 2019, with an increasing proportion of physicians in every age group shifting away from family practice.

Forecasting over 3 million without a family doctor by 2025 does not account for the number of new graduates from family medicine. However, [research shows that fewer students are choosing careers as family doctors](#). It is expected that there will not be enough new doctors to cover all patients who lose their doctor to retirement.

The population in Ontario is expected to exceed 15 million by 2025. As Ontario's population ages and as advances in medicine are made, patients need more complex health supports.

A [new report from CFIB](#) found that physicians in Ontario spent approximately 18 million hours on administrative work per year in 2021, with unnecessary administrative work making up 38 per cent, or approximately 6.9 million hours, of the annual total. That is equivalent to over 20 million patient visits per year spent by physicians on unnecessary administrative work that can be done by someone else or eliminated altogether.

The pandemic and the administrative burden increase have left Ontario in a position where there will not be enough new doctors to cover all patients who lose their doctor to retirement. The CFPC found that the [burnout rate among family physicians tripled in 2021](#) compared to the previous year, with 51 percent of family physicians indicated they were working beyond capacity. A [National Physician Health Survey conducted in 2021](#) by the Canadian Medical Association found that workload is the top factor affecting family physician mental health. Research shows 2-in-3 family doctors are experiencing moderate to severe burnout, and 1-in-4 family doctors are experiencing high or severe burnout.

-30-

#### References:

1. Primary care attachment data for 2020: INSPIRE PHC Primary Care Data Reports. Publicly available at <https://www.ontariohealthprofiles.ca/ontarioHealthTeam.php>
2. Trends in patient attachment to an aging primary care workforce: a population-based serial cross-sectional study in Ontario, Canada. Kamila Premji, Michael E Green, Richard H Glazier, Shahriar Khan, Susan E Schultz, Maria Mathews, Steve Nastos, Eliot Frymire, Bridget L Ryan. medRxiv 2023.01.19.23284729; <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2023.01.19.23284729v1>
3. Data sources: The research cited above uses centralized health services databases and includes all Ontario residents who have OHIP coverage and all registered Ontario primary care physicians from 2008 to 2022.

\* Previously, the OCFP reported a Stats Can survey estimating that 1.3M were without a regular doctor in 2019. Stats Can and INSPIRE data have been collected differently.