

Background

In 2022, using data from [INSPIRE-PHC](#) (INSPIRE Primary Health Care), the Ontario College of Family Physicians forecasted that in three years, 1 in 5 Ontarians would be without a family doctor.

Using updated research, the Ontario College of Family Physicians now predicts that Ontario will exceed its previous forecast as the crisis in family medicine intensifies. Approximately 1 in 4 Ontarians – or 4.4 million – will be without a family doctor by 2026.

The College's projection is based on the number of Ontarians currently without a regular family doctor, those who have a doctor over age 65 and therefore poised to retire, as well as the number of expected graduates in family medicine and population trends. The projection also includes the potential impact of family doctors looking to make changes to or leave their practice. Expected population trends are also considered.

As of September 2022, [data by INSPIRE-PHC](#) posted on the Ontario Community Health Profiles Partnership ([OCHPP](#)) shows nearly 2.3 million Ontarians are without a family doctor – that's up from 1.8 million in March 2020, or up from 1.6 million in 2018. INSPIRE-PHC research, led by Dr. Kamila Premji, also shows 1.74 million Ontarians have a doctor who is nearing retirement.

The INSPIRE-PHC teams' data further shows a [clear downward trend in the number of doctors who practice comprehensive family medicine](#). In 2008, 77 per cent of family doctors in Ontario were spending the majority of their time providing this type of care, which includes the preventative and acute care that Ontarians need. However, as of 2022, the number of family physicians who provide this type of care has declined to 65 per cent. Family doctors of all ages and career stages are choosing not to practice comprehensive family medicine.

Meanwhile, the number of medical school graduates choosing to pursue family medicine is the [lowest it's been in 15 years](#).

Adding to the crisis, member research by the Ontario College of Family Physicians conducted in March 2023, revealed that nearly two-thirds of Ontario's family doctors (65 per cent) are planning on making a change to their practice model by reducing their hours or leaving the profession in the next five years. According to research by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Ontario's unnecessary administrative burden is estimated to be equivalent to 20.6 million patient visits, assuming an average of 20 minutes per visit or three visits an hour.

Ontario's population growth may further worsen the problem. The province's population is expected to surpass 19 million by 2043. As Ontario's population grows and ages, patients will need more complex health supports.

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References:

- Primary care attachment data for 2020: INSPIRE PHC Primary Care Data Reports. Publicly available at <https://www.ontariohealthprofiles.ca/ontarioHealthTeam.php>
- Data on the HHR implications of an ageing family physician workforce and shifts away from comprehensive family practice: Dr. Kamila Premji MD, PhD(c), FCFP, CCFP (also part of the INSPIRE PHC collaborative)

- Data sources: The research cited above uses centralized health services databases housed at ICES. The measurement used for the family physician population is one of several accepted approaches.
- Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Your Voice survey. September 8-26, 2022.
- Canadian Medical Association. National Physician Health Survey 2021. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Medical Association; 2022. Accessed October 15, 2023. https://www.cma.ca/sites/default/files/2022-08/NPHS_final_report_EN.pdf
- Statistics Canada: [Population Projections for Canada \(2021 to 2068\), Provinces and Territories \(2021 to 2043\)](#).
- Lavergne R, Peterson S, Rudoler D, Scott I, McCracken R., Mitra G., Katz A. Productivity Decline or Administrative Avalanche? Examining Factors That Shape Changing Workloads in Primary Care. Healthcare Policy 19(1) August 2023 : 114-129.doi:10.12927/hcpol.2023.27152.
- 2023 OCFP Membership Survey. March 9 – March 23, 2023. ON n= 1,343 (response rate of 9.2%).