

Frequently Asked Questions

Why does NS need physicians?

Jurisdictions around the world are competing for physician resources as currently, more doctors (and other health care providers) are leaving practice through retirement than those that are entering. The way physicians practice today is different than in years previous. The image of the “community doctor” who worked endless hours and provided house calls from a solo practice setting is becoming a part of history. New graduates value work-life balance and an interdisciplinary team setting. While Nova Scotia is growing it’s offering of these types of practice environments, we are learning that treating patients in these settings require more physicians for the patient population than we currently have. For example, a solo practice physician who retires might treat between 2000-3000 patients. Newer physicians have more diverse practices and typically see an average of 1000-1500 patients. This means that we may require two or three new physicians to replace one who has recently retired.

With an aging population in Nova Scotia, and many patients who face serious and sometimes overlapping chronic health conditions, the patient population in our province is more complex and thus, require more time with physicians which also increases the number of physicians needed to serve this patient group. NSHA strives to bring community-based care and services to all Nova Scotians with a focus on the right care, by the right provider, in the right place, at the right time. Physician resources is an international competitive market. Much like the rest of Canada, we are competing with other countries for both Canadian-trained and internationally-trained physicians.

How are physicians compensated?

Physician compensation is set by a Master Agreement contract. This contract is negotiated between the Government of Nova Scotia and Doctors Nova Scotia who represent the physicians. NSHA does not set remuneration rates. Physicians bill the province for their services as per rate agreements in their contracts. NSHA does not employ physicians.

Are all physicians replaced?

All physicians who leave Nova Scotia are replaced. Vacancies are tracked by NSHA and reported monthly to the Department of Health and Wellness. Job postings are created based on approved vacancies and physicians are distributed accordingly based on specific physician positions. There are some cases where specialist physician vacancies are moved to accommodate a specific health need or recruitment opportunity for a community. Family physicians can provide services in any are of the province they prefer, provided there is a need for their service in the area they choose (population health need to support an additional physician and/or enough unattached patients on the Find a Family Practice registry). They can do this by assuming one of the provincially approved vacancies.

Who is responsible for physician recruitment in Nova Scotia?

The Province of Nova Scotia transferred the mandate for physician recruitment to NSHA in 2016. At that time, NSHA received funding for one employee and a small amount of funding for relocation and site visits. Physician recruitment in Nova Scotia is most successful when everyone is at the table (see Recruitment Stakeholders page). NSHA has been working with community

stakeholders and local physicians to enhance our success across the province and these partnerships have proven very helpful in many areas of our work. In addition to these partnerships, many communities across the province have created recruitment and Retention committees to champion recruitment efforts in their region. Established physicians also participate as physician ambassadors (link to ambassador page on recruitment.nshealth.ca/contact-us) to show that you can practice great medicine and live a great life in Nova Scotia.

What makes a physician want to practice and stay in Nova Scotia?

When creating our More than Medicine brand, we spoke to many physicians about why they choose to live and practice in Nova Scotia. Our brand pillars (ocean lifestyle, scope of practice, and connectedness) showcase the things they told us were important to them: work-life balance and quality of life inside and outside of their practice. Physicians say that Nova Scotia has a great advantage because of the many diverse practice opportunities, beautiful communities with affordable living, proximity to other major centers, and a tightly-connected medical and professional community.