

Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members
Community and Protective Services Committee

From: Kevin Dickins, Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development and
Scott Mathers, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic
Development

Subject: Primary Care Recruitment, Transition into Practice, and Retention
Program Funding Request

Date: July 18, 2023

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development and with the concurrence of the Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development, the following actions **be taken** with respect to the July 18, 2023, Primary Care Recruitment, Transition into Practice, and Retention Program Funding Request;

- a. The Middlesex London Ontario Health Team - Primary Care Recruitment report and presentation **BE RECEIVED** for information purposes,
- b. The City's financial contribution **BE APPROVED** from the Economic Development Reserve Fund in the amount of \$80,000 per year for 3 years, and
- c. Civic Administration **BE AUTHORIZED** to undertake all administrative acts which are necessary in relation to Middlesex London Ontario Health Team - Primary Care Recruitment Program.

Executive Summary

Like many other communities across Canada, London is continuing to see an increase demand in Primary Care.

The Purpose of this report is to seek funding for our Primary Care Recruitment, Transition into Practice, and Retention Program. As outlined in the attached as Appendix A, a Funding Request for Primary Care Recruitment and Retention Program.

The Middlesex London Ontario Health Team (MLOHT) is a dedicated team of local healthcare providers and community members who are working together to better connect healthcare and supports across Middlesex County & London.

Within the MLOHT, a Primary Care Recruitment, Transition into Practice, and Retention Program Working Group was created to review the needs of Middlesex and London. The group has completed a thorough review of various regions' recruitment programs.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

This report aligns with the following strategic areas of focus in the 2023-2027 [City of London Strategic Plan](#):

Wellbeing and Safety:

- London has safe, vibrant, and healthy neighbourhoods and communities.
- London is an affordable and supportive community for individuals and families.
- Londoners have safe access to public spaces, services, and supports that increase wellbeing and quality of life.
- Londoners have access to quality, affordable, and timely services.
- Londoners have equitable access to key services, community supports, and recreational opportunities that enhance wellbeing and resilience.

Economic Growth and Prosperity:

London encourages equitable economic growth and diversification:

London is a regional centre that proactively attracts and retains talent, business, and investment.

Improved health equity across neighbourhoods.

- Continue to apply a health equity lens to the delivery of MLHU programs and services.
- Increase focus on addressing food insecurity in priority neighbourhoods.
- Increase the capacity of employees to understand and have empathy for mental health as we deliver services to Londoners. d. Consider mobility poverty in health equity strategies.

London has a robust community system of health, homelessness, housing stability services, policies, procedures, and by-laws in place to support individuals and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness or in precarious housing consistent with Council’s recognition of the health and homelessness emergency.

Links to Community Recovery

The City of London is committed to working in partnership with the community to identify solutions that will drive a strong, deep, and inclusive community recovery for London as we move out of and beyond the global COVID-19 pandemic. This report, and the items within, are linked to supporting Londoners experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic to attain and retain permanent housing. This work supports recovery efforts through a coordinated COVID-19 Response that will support the transition of homeless individuals and families.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

No other reports related to this matter

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

As a partnership between MLOHT and the primary care sector, working groups were formed to develop a driver diagram to identify change initiatives to improve access to primary care in Middlesex London area. Middlesex London Ontario Health Team (MLOHT) overview of purposed initiatives, Access to Primary Care: Recruitment, Transition into Practice and Retention Program are outlined as attached in schedule 1, to this report.

As a result of those working groups, three change initiatives were prioritized for implementation:

- 1. Develop a Coordinated Recruitment/Transition into Practice Program**
2. Decrease administrative burden through increasing awareness of digital tools that help improve capacity/reduce administrative burden.
3. Empower/enable healthcare workers to work to full scope of practice (NPs, MDs, RNs, RPNs, Medical Office Administrators and others)

Middlesex London is not attracting enough primary care providers to provide primary care to its growing population let alone replacing the retiring physicians. Most other municipalities in Ontario have a recruitment program (of varying sizes and scope). These physician recruitment programs consist of entirely municipally funded strategies or partially funded programs in partnership with other organizations as seen in **Figure 1** below.

There are currently no consistent processes or resources to support proactive recruitment of family medicine residents to encourage them to set up practices in London. The economic well-being of Middlesex London is intricately linked with the health of its people and family physicians are one of the cornerstones of the health care system.

Figure 1.

Region	Program	Annual Budget	Funders	Oversight
Sarnia Lambton County	Bluecoast Primary Care	\$100K	City of Sarnia Lambton County Municipalities Interest from Investments	Recruitment Task Force

			Other	
Kingston	Possible Made Here	\$250K + \$35K	City of Kingston	City Council
Hamilton	Hamilton Physicians	\$180K	City of Hamilton McMaster University Hamilton FHT McMaster Dept of FM Hamilton Health Sciences St. Josephs Health Care Greater Hamilton Health Network OHT Hamilton Chamber of Commerce	GHHN OHT
KW	Greater KW Physician Recruitment	?	Municipal and Corporate Funding	Chamber Health Care Resources Council
Cambridge	Doctors4Cambridge	\$100K	City, Hospital, Private Donors	Chamber of Commerce

2.1 Key Issues for London

In London there is a growing inequity in physician distribution throughout the city where currently East London has 3.25 family physicians for every 10,000 residents. This is in contrast to the rest of London where the rates per every 10,000 residents sits at 8.4.

Compounding the challenges in London is the lack of existing physicians accepting new patients. At time of writing, according to Middlesex London Ontario Health Team (MLOHT) data, no physicians are registered with Health Care Connect, meaning there are no expansive plans for those in need of a physician to access.

New provincial guidelines expect physicians to set up in groups of six (6) or more. This new requirement paints a grim picture in London as only 32% of Family Physicians (FPs) have access to Team Based Care.

Increasingly, LEDC is seeing expanding or locating companies, either directly or through site selectors and other levels of government, have a greater emphasis on the degree to which a community is a great place to live and prosper. Requested information at initial and subsequent new investment enquiries received by LEDC have not only included direct business considerations (land and talent availability, market access, business conditions, etc.) but also an increased emphasis on healthcare, housing, transit, and childcare considerations, as well as engagement, diversity, environmental, and safety considerations.

The Fraser Institute released in 2013 a collection of articles titled *Reducing Wait Times for Health Care: What Canada Can Learn from Theory and International Experience* and found that patients or caregivers of patients waiting for healthcare typically displayed a reduction in economic activity caused by absenteeism (time spent out of the workforce as a consequence of untreated health problems), or presenteeism (reduced on-the-job productivity of employees as a consequence of health problems). There are also avoidable healthcare system costs including additional appointments, tests, procedures, and medications associated with delayed medical care.

Many patients are turning to emergency rooms for primary healthcare and are contributing to hospital overcrowding. When the system is stressed or caregivers are rushed, decision making is altered, rates of error increase, and important processes of care are impeded. For example, healthcare providers may limit tests, shorten consultations, or shorten observation periods to free space for other patients. Multiple studies referenced by the Fraser Institute found there to be statistically significant linkages between an increase in primary care physicians per capita with lower mortality rates.

2.2 Program Overview

The Middlesex London Ontario Health Team (MLOHT) Primary Care Recruitment and Retention Program aims to address the current challenges through targeted initiatives, including:

- a. Hiring a Recruitment Coordinator: MLOHT will hire a dedicated Recruitment Coordinator to actively engage with key stakeholders to attract and recruit primary care providers, with an initial focus on family physicians, to our area. This role will also be involved in retention strategies, as outlined below.
- b. Retention Strategies: MLOHT will implement retention strategies such as mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and initiatives to improve work-life balance, aiming to retain existing primary care providers within the community.

The role of the Recruitment and Retention Coordinator would be to coordinate activities designed to increase and stabilize the number of primary care practices in Middlesex London to meet the primary care needs of the population. These deliverables have been identified by MLOHT as follows:

- Regional strategy development
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Physician Recruitment activities
- Physician Retention activities

The program aims to launch in October of 2023.

3.0 Funding Impact/ Considerations

The total cost of implementing and running the Primary Care Recruitment and Retention Program is estimated to be \$200,000 per year. This budget includes the salary and benefits of the recruitment coordinator, as well as the expenses associated with organizing events and outreach initiatives.

Funding Partners:

The Middlesex London Ontario Health Team is seeking financial support for a minimum of three years from a variety of organizations, including the City of London, Middlesex County, London Economic Development Corporation, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, London Health Sciences Centre, St. Joseph's Health Care and Middlesex Hospital Alliance. MLOHT and their Coordinating Council believe that a collaborative approach is essential to effectively address the primary care physician workforce shortage in our community.

MLOHT is also seeking in-kind contributions to the program from both the organizations listed above and other organizations in the region. Examples of in-kind contributions from organizations for consideration include marketing and communications support, equipment and supplies, planning and implementation working group members.

The MLOHT is requesting \$80,000 per year for a minimum of 3 years as a financial contribution from the City of London. It is recommended by Civic Administration that this contribution be approved, with the funds sourced from the Economic Development Reserve Fund due to the anticipated economic benefits associated with this initiative as noted above. The current uncommitted balance of the Economic Development Reserve Fund is approximately \$11.0 million prior to the approval of this expenditure.

4.0 Next Steps

The Middlesex London Ontario Health Team (MLOHT), along with identified partners will continue to advance the work to finalize an operational Terms of Reference and through the MLOHT Coordinating Council refinement of preliminary Key Performance Indicators will take place. The Physician Recruitment program is set to launch in October, 2023.

Conclusion

Recommended by: Kevin Dickins, Deputy City Manager, Social and Health Development
Concurred by: Scott Mathers, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Economic Development

cc: Kapil Lakhotia, President & CEO London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC)
Robert Collins, Senior Advisor, Workforce Initiatives, London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC)

Christine Wilton, Director, Workforce Development, London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC)