

Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members
Community and Protective Services Committee

From: Sandra Datars Bere, City Manager

Subject: Primary Care Recruitment and Retention Program Report

Date: March 17, 2025

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the City Manager, the report, including the attached “Primary Care Recruitment Program Year-In-Review, 2024” report from Middlesex London Ontario Health Team, **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the Primary Care Recruitment and Retention Program addressing the shortage of family physicians in the London-Middlesex region, led by the Middlesex-London Ontario Health Team (MLOHT). The report summarizes the first year of activities delivered through the initiative and outlines provincial and local developments helping connect people to primary care.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

- Strategic Area of Focus: Wellbeing and Safety.
- Outcome: London is an affordable and supportive community for individuals and families.
- Expected Result: Londoners have access to quality, affordable, and timely services.
- Strategy: Support community-led initiatives and partnerships through grants, collaboration and community plans that promote the wellbeing of Londoners.

- Strategic Area of Focus: Economic Growth and Prosperity.
- Outcome: London encourages equitable economic growth and diversification.
- Expected Result: London is a regional centre that proactively attracts and retains talent, business, and investment.
- Strategies:
 - Attract and retain a skilled workforce by marketing London as a destination for new investments, education, and talent.
 - Foster and leverage strategic partnerships that promote collaboration, innovation, and investment in business and employment.
 - Strengthen London’s position as a regional centre for economic opportunity, and connectivity.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter

- Primary Care Recruitment, Transition into Practice, and Retention Program Funding Request ([CPSC, July 18, 2023](#)).

1.2 Purpose

At its July 25, 2023 meeting, Council resolved:

“That the following actions be taken with respect to the staff report, dated July 18, 2023, related to the Primary Care Recruitment, Transition into Practice and Retention Program Funding Request:

- a) the Middlesex London Ontario Health Team - Primary Care Recruitment report and presentation, as appended to the Agenda, BE RECEIVED;
- b) the Civic Administration BE DIRECTED to review opportunities through the Rethink Zoning process to facilitate the establishment of Team Based Family Care facilities, notwithstanding our policies locating major office uses in the downtown core, and consistent with the new provincial guidelines expecting physicians to set up in groups of six or more for Team Based Care;
- c) the City’s financial contribution BE APPROVED from the Economic Development Reserve Fund in the amount of \$50,000 per year for 1 year; it being noted that the program will be re-evaluated after the one-year contribution; and,
- d) the Civic Administration BE AUTHORIZED to undertake all administrative acts which are necessary in relation to the Middlesex London Ontario Health Team – Primary Care Recruitment Program. (2023-S08) (AS AMENDED) (2.4/12/CPSC).”

The purpose of this report is to report back to Council on the one-year funded activities in accordance with item c) in the resolution.

1.3 Background

The Primary Care Recruitment and Retention Program emerged from a partnership between Middlesex-London Ontario Health Team (MLOHT) and the primary care sector to address the issue of primary care physician shortages. The July 2023 CPSC report estimated that 65,000 residents in London and Middlesex did not have access to a primary care provider.

The program design seeks to address the primary care physician shortage through: regional strategy development; physician recruitment activities; and physician retention activities.

In the first year of the program, funding partners included: London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC); London Health Sciences Centre; St. Joseph’s Health Care; Schulich Medical and Dentistry School; Middlesex Hospital Alliance; and the City of London. Cost centres included salary, promotional materials, conferences and events, and travel. In-kind partners include MLOHT and Middlesex London Primary Care Network.

Following a recruitment process and the development of the detailed program design, physician recruitment program activities rolled out fully in early 2024.

2.0 Family Physician Recruitment and Retention

2.1 MLOHT Report Summary

The 2024 year-in-review report from MLOHT is attached as Appendix A.

The report outlines the variety of activities undertaken through the program under the themes of recruitment, onboarding, and retention. Of note, the report identifies 6 doctors added to area clinics, with 15 more candidates likely to be placed in the next six months.

The report also provides updated enrollment data that estimates approximately 25% of the London-Middlesex population does not have access to a family doctor, equating to over 100,000 people in London and Middlesex. Additionally, it projects 61 area doctors are likely to retire in the 1-5 years; these doctors care for an estimated 85,000 patients.

2.2 Provincial Developments

On December 1, 2024, the Ontario government responded to the province-wide shortage of family physicians by appointing Dr. Jane Philpott to lead Ontario's Primary Care Action Team. The team's mandate is to ensure every person in Ontario has access to primary health care, focusing on three pillars:

- Connecting you to a Primary Care Team
- Making Primary Care More Connected and Convenient
- Supporting Primary Care Providers¹

Key performance indicators include:

- % of Ontarians who have ongoing connection to primary care
- % of primary care providers who work in interdisciplinary teams
- % of Ontarians who can get an appointment same day or next day when needed
- % of Ontarians who can access their health records online
- % of Ontarians cleared from Health Care Connect waitlist

On January 27, 2025, the Ontario government announced a \$1.8 billion investment, including \$1.4 billion in new funding and \$400 million in previously approved funding, to connect two million more people with a family doctor or primary care team over four years.

During the 2025 provincial election period, every major party platform highlighted primary care as a priority issue for Ontario. With the Conservative Party's reelection on February 27, the work of the Primary Care Action Team is expected to continue.

2.3 Local Actions

MLOHT continues to coordinate physician recruitment activities, supported by a consortium of partners offering direct and in-kind contributions. MLOHT's recruitment lead serves as a Director of the Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance, a province-wide initiative to increase the number of physicians practicing in Ontario.

Funding partners confirmed for 2025 include LEDC, London Health Sciences Centre, St. Joseph's Health Care, and Schulich Medical and Dentistry School. Recognizing the importance of physician availability as a draw for businesses and professionals, LEDC has also integrated physician recruitment and retention into its broader workforce development strategy and established a web presence to support recruitment efforts.

At the 2024 Association of Municipalities of Ontario Conference, City of London representatives met with Ontario Medical Association leadership to share information on local physician shortages and align provincial advocacy efforts. Civic Administration continues to monitor both provincial and local developments and participate in local discussion as they occur. Civic Administration will pursue opportunities to join working groups and advocate for London through the work of Dr. Philpott's Primary Care Action Team.

Conclusion

Ensuring timely access to primary care is vital to the health and well-being of London's residents and overall community prosperity. The Middlesex London Ontario Health Team, working alongside local partners, has led foundational efforts to address the

¹ [Ontario's Primary Care Action Plan Connecting Every Person in Ontario to Primary Care January 2025](#)

physician shortage in the region. This challenge extends beyond municipal boundaries, and the City is encouraged by the Province's commitment to expand primary care access for all Ontarians. As Dr. Philpott's Primary Care Action Team moves forward, Civic Administration will remain engaged in advocacy, collaboration, and recruitment and retention efforts to ensure London's needs are well-represented and addressed effectively.

Submitted by: Trevor Fowler, Director, Strategy, Innovation and Economic Development

Recommended by: Sandra Datars Bere, City Manager

Appendix A: Primary Care Recruitment Program Year-In-Review, 2024