



June 12, 2024

The Honorable Michelle Thompson
Minister of Health
Department of Health and Wellness
1894 Barrington Street
P.O. Box 488
Halifax, NS
B3J 2R8

Via Email: Health.Minister@novascotia.ca

Dear Minister Thompson,

Re: Healthcare Services Analysis

We are reaching out to you regarding a matter of utmost urgency concerning the healthcare services in Shelburne. In 2021, Shelburne Municipal Council made a crucial decision to employ a Community Navigator to support Nova Scotia Health (NSH) in recruitment and retention efforts. Since then, the Community Navigator has been diligently providing confidential reports to Council, highlighting current challenges, opportunities, recruitment efforts, and retention activities. These reports have highlighted deficiencies in our healthcare services, with the following areas of concern consistently emerging, all of which were previously discussed with your honor in a meeting with the Shelburne Municipal Council on March 7, 2023:

1. **Need for a Lead Physician and Mentorship:** Shelburne urgently requires a lead physician capable of providing preceptorship and mentorship. Despite efforts to engage with Nova Scotia Health for a strategic recruitment plan, our request has not yielded positive results. Shelburne needs long-term recruitment solutions and increased capacity to participate in residency placements.
2. **Hospitalist:** It is imperative to establish a provincial standard ensuring that every hospital has at least one hospitalist. Roseway Hospital is currently the only hospital in Western Health Zone without a hospitalist. Although there is a vacancy for in-patient care, the difficulty in filling this role stems from an inadequate compensation package. Roseway Hospital offers a salary range of \$250,000 to \$300,000, whereas hospitals in Yarmouth, Kentville, and Lunenburg offer \$300,000 to \$350,000. This disparity impedes our ability to attract candidates. The continued obligation of our family physicians to be solely responsible for inpatient care is directly impacting our ability to retain doctors, this has been illustrated through exit interviews with the last four departing physicians, Roseway Hospital needs a hospitalist.

3. Long-Term Care: Our long-term care physician is currently transitioning into retirement. We have recently been informed that this position will be integrated into the rotation of our family physician. Although we understand that our family physicians play a part, like the hospitalist position, the sole responsibility to meet this need cannot be left to our family physicians. This is not a sustainable solution for Shelburne, especially considering the expansion of our long-term care facility from 60 beds to 112 beds.
4. Practice Ready Assessment Program: All the physicians currently practicing in Shelburne are Practice Ready Assessment Program (PRAP) physicians. Given the current workload and without an experienced physician to lead our healthcare team and provide mentorship to those physicians coming to Shelburne, it will continue to be difficult to be successful in retaining PRAP physicians past their three-year return of service. Is there data to illustrate the success rate of rural communities in retaining PRAP physicians past their return of service placement?
5. Work-Life Balance for Physicians: It has become apparent that a major barrier to physician retention in Shelburne is work-life balance. Past and current physicians have expressed concerns about the contract obligations associated with in-patient care and family practice, which significantly impact their ability to achieve a desirable work-life balance. We believe that dedicating a full-time in-patient physician at Roseway Hospital is essential to alleviate the workload on our family physicians. Furthermore, the recent requirement for family physicians to cover our long-term care facility raises questions about workload standards across Nova Scotia.
6. Emergency Health Services (EHS): Despite announcements of investments and improvements in EHS over the past three years, we continue to experience inadequate coverage and prolonged response times. We urge clarification on the implementation and success of these improvements.
7. Increased and Ongoing Emergency Department Closures: We are deeply concerned about the increased and ongoing closures of Roseway Hospital's emergency department. These closures not only compromise our communities access to essential emergency services but also puts additional strain on attending physicians preceding, during and following emergency department shifts and neighboring healthcare facilities, leading to overcrowding and delays in accessing critical services. It is imperative to address the root causes of the vacancies for locum and full-time emergency department physicians to ensure uninterrupted access to emergency care for our community members.

Given these pressing issues, we strongly urge the Department of Health and Wellness to initiate, collaborate on, and fund a third-party review of our current Nova Scotia Health and Emergency Health services for Shelburne County. This review should be comprehensive and comparative, focusing on three main objectives: firstly, assessing specific challenges and shortcomings within our local healthcare services, and secondly, comparing these findings against similar community hospital, clinic, and emergency operations and thirdly, a comparative analysis will enable us to identify best practices and innovative solutions that have been successful elsewhere in addressing similar healthcare challenges. The comparative aspect of this review is crucial for us to learn from successful models that have been implemented in similar community hospital and

clinic settings. We need actionable insights and proportional solutions to drive positive change and enhance our community's health and well-being.

We urge you to prioritize, finance and allocate the necessary resources and expertise for a thorough and unbiased review. The health and welfare of our community depend on timely and proactive measures to address healthcare challenges and improve access to care.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We eagerly anticipate your prompt action and the positive impact it will have on our community's healthcare services.

Sincerely,

Warden Penny Smith
Municipality of Shelburne



Warden Eddie Nickerson
Municipality of Barrington



Mayor Rex Stoddard
Town of Clark's Harbour



Mayor Cory Nickerson
Town of Lockeport



Mayor Harald Locke
Town of Shelburne



Cc: Rick Perkins, MP – South Shore
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