

# Stop the Crisis Physician Toolkit

## Health-Care Advocates

November 15, 2024



## Introduction

On Oct. 16, we launched [Stop the Crisis](#) to advocate for urgent government action on six health care priorities. We hope you will share our campaign with your patients and on your social networks to help amplify our messages. Only by channelling the voice of patients and the public can we move the government to act.

We've included some materials that we hope will make sharing our campaign easier for you. These include some key messaging, a LinkedIn post, some tweets, and copy that you might include in your practice newsletter if you have one. Please feel free to make this copy your own, of course.

Thank you for helping us put pressure on government to make needed investments.

## Key facts and messages

- Ontario's health-care system is in crisis. 2.5 million Ontarians are without a family doctor, emergency departments are overcrowded and struggling to stay open, and wait times for specialist care, surgeries and diagnostics are too long. Each of these presents a crisis—together, they're a catastrophe
- It's a critical situation everywhere, but it's even more acute in northern and rural Ontario
- Ontario's doctors are doing their best to provide patient care in a system that's broken
- Ontarians deserve better, and Ontario's doctors are laying out the steps the government must take to stop the crisis

[We are focusing on six main priorities with specific recommendations under each to solve these issues:](#)

### Every Ontarian needs a family doctor

- Access to family medicine is the foundation of Ontario's health care system—but it's out of reach for a huge number of Ontarians
- More than 2.5 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor today—and that's projected to rise to 4.4 million in the next two years
- That's 4.4 million Ontarians who will have to get healthcare piecemeal through overcrowded emergency departments and walk-in clinics. This results in worse health outcomes
- Everyone in Ontario can have a family doctor, if the province takes bold steps to make the system more efficient, attract more physicians to family medicine, and retain the family doctors we have today

## Save northern and rural health care

- Ontarians are experiencing access-to-care challenges across the province, but those in northern and rural communities are facing extraordinary difficulty
- Residents in northern Ontario struggle to access health care while facing major health challenges: higher rates of suicide, opioid-related deaths, diabetes, obesity and complex chronic diseases
- There are more than 350 physician vacancies in northern communities, including over 200 family doctors
- Residents of rural and northern Ontario already face worse health outcomes and shorter life expectancy. As health care becomes more and more inaccessible, we can expect that to get worse
- Family doctors also provide emergency care in the north, and many are forced to sacrifice their family medicine practice to keep emergency departments open
- Ontario needs a dedicated strategy for health care access in northern and rural communities

## Keep emergency departments open

- Emergency department closures have become alarmingly common in rural and northern parts of the province
- Between July 2022 and June 2023, 23 different hospitals closed their emergency departments a total of 203 times
- In northern and rural areas, family doctors in the community also provide health care in the local emergency department
- As family medicine has been put under increasing strain, physicians are being forced to choose between their practice and their community's ED
- As fewer and fewer residents have a family doctor, more rely on the emergency department as their primary way of accessing care—adding even more burden to the system
- Ontario needs a method of rostering and dispatching doctors to cover communities that are in danger of having to close their emergency departments due to a lack of staff and create the community capacity required to move patients out of acute-care beds and into more appropriate care

## Improve access to surgical, specialist & diagnostic tests

- Staff shortages and a piecemeal approach to waitlists and referrals have hampered access to the specialists, diagnostic testing and specialists that Ontarians need
- A centralized referral system would vastly increase patient access while reducing administrative load for family doctors
- A shortage of anesthesiologists and other specialists has placed serious constraints on Ontario's surgical capacity

- The province is short of over 100 anesthesiologists, with the largest gap in Northern Ontario
- A 2023 study found that more than half of Ontario's hospitals surveyed had an operating room closure in the previous six months due to this shortage
- This is just one area where a team-based care model could make a huge difference
- We are calling on the government to fund the specialized care training and hiring of teams, such as anesthesia care teams, to help significantly reduce wait times

## Health workforce strategy

- At its core, Ontario's health care crisis is about health human resources, reflecting physician shortages across the province
- The shortage also cuts across a broad section of the health-care system, from anesthesiologists to cardiologists to family doctors
- The physicians in place are stretched thin, doing their best to make a dysfunctional system work
- Ontario needs to attract new doctors to every area of the province while retaining those who are burned out and considering relocating or retiring
- Funding needs to reflect the economic realities of running a practice, including inflationary pressures and the growing complexity of patient care
- The province also needs to boost investments in medical schools for students, and post-graduate resident opportunities
- It also needs to be easier for those educated and trained outside of Canada to become practicing physicians

## Enhance digital health and innovation

- Ontario's health-care system is stuck in the past
- To make health care more patient-focused and efficient, the province needs to embrace technology and innovation
- Investing in digital tools can decrease administrative workloads, reduce hospital stays and improve health outcomes, reducing costs and adding capacity to the system
- AI scribes are a great example of a digital tool that could make the system work better for everyone
- Family doctors spend 19 hours per week on paperwork. AI scribes help doctors produce clinical charts, saving four hours per week on average
- That's a win for physicians, patients and the government
- We're calling on the government to work with OMA to fund the use of AI scribes across the province

## Article for your patient newsletter

Ontario's health-care system is in crisis, and it's time to speak up.

Ontario's doctors have launched an urgent advocacy campaign to demand government action on health care, and I'm hoping you will join us.

The scope of the problem is enormous. More than 2.5 million people live without a family doctor in Ontario. Emergency departments are overcrowded and struggling to stay open. Getting a specialist appointment, surgery or diagnostic test takes too long. The list goes on and on.

Ontarians deserve better and the government needs to act. When it comes to getting their attention, there's nothing more powerful than the voices of the public.

### **Here's what you can do:**

Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca) to learn more about the family medicine crisis, emergency department closures and other urgent health care issues.

Use the "Email your MPP Now" button on the site to email your MPP, the Premier and the Health Minister to demand action.

Post about the health crisis on your social channels using the share buttons on the left side of the page.

According to a survey sponsored by OMA, 89 per cent of Ontarians are concerned about the future of Ontario's health-care system. It's time for all of us to demand change. I hope you'll join me in speaking up for our province's future.

## **Tweets**

- When did 19 hours of paperwork become the 'normal' in Ontario? It's time for the government to act so I can get back to practicing medicine. Our patients deserve better. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)
- #StopTheCrisis campaign and demand better health care in Ontario. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca) Doctors across the province are experiencing burnout and are exhausted with the current health-care system. It's time for us to be heard, and for the government to step up. Join the #StopTheCrisis campaign and demand better health care in Ontario. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)
- I see it every day — patients calling my office looking for a family doctor. This is not sustainable; this is just sad. The government needs to act NOW before even more Ontarians fall through the cracks. Join the #StopTheCrisis campaign and demand better health care in Ontario. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)

- Emergency departments are struggling to remain operational, and we as physicians are bearing the consequences. It's time to #StopTheCrisis in our health-care system. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)
- The pressures of working in an Emergency Department are increasing, and shifts are becoming more and more unpredictable. We need the government to start providing support for our physicians. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)
- The government promised to end hallway health care, but patients are still waiting in ED hallways and on surgical wait lists. It's time to hold them to that promise and demand the care Ontarians deserve. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)
- We need solutions, not excuses. Ontario's doctors are here to provide care, but we're drowning in a broken system. It's time to fix it — for our patients, for our future. Join the #StopTheCrisis campaign and demand better health care in Ontario. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)
- Doctors across Ontario are working tirelessly, but we're stuck in a system that's falling apart. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca). #StopTheCrisis
- We need more family doctors, more resources, and REAL solutions. The time for action is now. Join the #StopTheCrisis campaign and demand better health care in Ontario. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)
- 2.5 million Ontarians are without a family doctor — that's not a statistic, it's a crisis. This government needs to act before it doubles to 4.4 million. Our patients can't wait. Join the #StopTheCrisis campaign and demand better health care in Ontario. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)
- Patients shouldn't have to choose between long wait times or overburdened ERs. Ontario's doctors are doing everything we can, but we need the system to support us — and our patients. Join the #StopTheCrisis campaign and demand better health care in Ontario. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)
- Doctors are on the front lines, but we're facing an uphill battle every day. Long waits, overcrowded hospitals, and not enough family doctors. We need action — not more empty promises. Join the #StopTheCrisis campaign and demand better health care in Ontario. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)
- Ontario's doctors are doing everything we can to care for our patients, but we're hitting roadblocks at every turn. This government needs to step up, prioritize health care, and #StopTheCrisis. Join the #StopTheCrisis campaign and demand better health care in Ontario. Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca)

## LinkedIn Post

Feel free to write something original for LinkedIn or use the copy below and customize as you see fit.

Doctors across Ontario are working tirelessly, but we're stuck in a system that's falling apart. And patients are suffering. More than 2.5 million are living without a family doctor. Emergency Departments are overcrowded and struggling to stay open. Getting a specialist appointment, surgery or diagnostic test takes too long. This is a crisis. Please join me in telling our government that we need more resources, and REAL solutions.

Visit [stopthehealthcrisis.ca](http://stopthehealthcrisis.ca) to learn more about the crisis, and what the government needs to do to make health care work for all Ontarians. You'll also find an easy-to-use tool to contact your MPP to demand change.

## Meeting with your MPP

Doctors have the solutions to the most urgent health-system issues, and we need your help to raise awareness about them. It is important that MPPs across Ontario are aware of and support these recommendations, laid out in the Stop the Crisis campaign, and we've put together the following tips to help you elevate them.

## Contacting your MPP

- Message or tag them on social media
- Email or call their office to express your concerns
- Email or call them to request a meeting

## Preparing for your meeting

1. Check which party your MPP is affiliated with and see if your MPP holds a position in government or opposition. If they hold a position, you may tailor your comments to their file to make your arguments more relevant to their work.
2. Check out the key messages that will be provided on this page. Do not provide the key messages to the MPP but, if necessary, have them in front of you during the call or meeting.
3. We suggest aligning your messages with the key messages provided. The more we can offer a clear, consistent, solution-oriented message to government, the more likely they are to hear our calls and act.

## Tips for a good meeting

The best meetings are a two-way dialogue. Your MPP wants to be well-informed about local issues and to form a connection with you.

- Introduce yourself and your practice — make it as personal as possible. The MPP may share their own experiences in the health-care system
- Explain the issues you want to discuss
- Use personal stories or examples
- Localize your issues to the community they represent. Your MPP needs to understand that decisions made at Queen's Park have local impacts
- Offer to follow up and keep in touch

Feel free to review the OMA's strategies for improving the health-care system, as outlined in the Stop the Crisis campaign. Use these solutions to ground the conversation in next steps as opposed to only outlining the problems.

## Following up on your meeting

Follow up to thank your MPP for the conversation. If additional information was requested during the meeting or phone call, provide it in your follow-up note.

## Reporting back to the OMA

Outreach to MPPs is a key element of the OMA's advocacy. We welcome a brief update on your meeting. Please reach out to the OMA's [government relations and advocacy team](#) with information on who you met with, a sense of how the meeting was received and any follow-ups that may be required. This feedback will help inform the OMA's advocacy on your behalf.

Thank you for your support and commitment to advancing health care in Ontario. We value your insights, expertise and continued support as we strive to achieve our shared goals and set up a meeting with your MPP.

## Email Template: Requesting a Meeting

Dear MPP [NAME]

I am [NAME], a [SPECIALTY] physician practicing in [INSERT COMMUNITY]. I am reaching out to express my concerns over the issue surrounding [PILLAR] and how to alleviate some of that strain. I would like to sit down and discuss how we can work together to address it.

[MESSAGING ON SELECTED PILLAR]



2.5 million Ontarians are without a family doctor, emergency departments are overcrowded and struggling to stay open. Wait times for specialist care, surgeries and diagnostics are too long. It's a critical situation everywhere, but doctors are doing their best to provide patient care in a system that's broken. Ontarians deserve better and we would like to help you achieve that goal.

We believe there is much we can achieve in health care by working together and I hope we can discuss this further. Thank you and please have a great day.

Sincerely,  
[NAME]

## Email Template: Thank you

Dear MPP/Hon. \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for meeting with me on [DATE]. I appreciate your willingness to discuss critical health-care challenges with me. Ontario's doctors are eager and prepared to work with you in addressing Ontario's most pressing health-care challenges.

As mentioned, on Oct. 16, we released [Stop the Crisis](#), a report containing pragmatic solutions targeting six priority areas:

- Every Ontarian needs a family doctor
- Save rural and northern Ontario
- Keep emergency departments open
- Improve access to surgeries, specialists and diagnostics
- Health workforce strategy
- Enhance digital health care and innovation

These recommendations have been carefully crafted through extensive consultations with physicians across the province. These recommendations will significantly contribute to improving Ontario's health-care system.

Thank you again for your time and attention. I would be happy to continue this conversation and be a resource for you should you have any questions on health care.

Sincerely,  
[NAME]

## Email Template: Declined Meeting

Dear MPP/Hon. \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for letting me know. I regret that I will miss the opportunity to discuss critical health-care challenges with you but understand the demands of your schedule. I will follow up later but if you do have any questions about health care in the meantime, please don't hesitate to ask.

On Oct. 16, the OMA released [\*Stop the Crisis\*](#), a report containing pragmatic solutions targeting six key priorities:

- Every Ontarian needs a family doctor
- Save rural and northern Ontario
- Keep emergency departments open
- Improve access to surgeries, specialists and diagnostics
- Health workforce strategy
- Enhance digital health care and innovation

We believe these priorities and solutions, crafted through extensive consultations with physicians across the province, will significantly contribute to improving Ontario's health-care system.

Thank you. I would be happy to be a resource for you should you have any questions on health care.

Sincerely,

[NAME]