



# More than Medicine.+

## *Physician Recruitment Strategy* 2020 - 2023





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# Our Reality

We want Nova Scotia to be a place where doctors come to practice – and stay to live. That’s why recruiting and retaining doctors is a top priority for Nova Scotia Health. And we’ve made significant strides forward. Together. We’re working closely with physicians, partners, and communities to promote our province. This strategy reflects that thinking and planning.

The focus is on ensuring Nova Scotians have access to the right health provider in the right place at the right time. Since 2016 when we became responsible for physician recruitment, we have been putting people, policies, and processes in place to support this vital component of our health system.

But the reality is this. The market for doctors is competitive – and it is global. It involves a constant focus as we work to fill the gaps of skilled health professionals left by those retiring. Compensation is important, but it is only one factor doctors weigh. We need to sell the entire package. We need to sell our reality:

**Nova Scotia is the best place to practice and the best place to live.**



## We’re making progress

Here are a few of the things we’ve done to date.

- Built and enhanced a physician-recruitment team with representatives from across the province
- Developed a competitive marketing strategy to attract doctors
- Attended career fairs across Canada – and beyond
- Enhanced the breadth and depth of our collaborations
- Established ways to measure success and put reporting processes in place
- Worked with our partners to increase the number of physicians able to be licensed to practice here
- Supported more opportunities for doctors to train in rural communities.



# Our Overarching Goal

Doctors in Nova Scotia, as elsewhere, are part of a complex health system that involves many partners who play unique roles. To ensure our system is robust and effective, we need to look at the big picture. Physician recruitment and retention is part of that picture – but only one part.

Our overarching goal, as outlined in the provincial health strategy, is to offer accessible and expert primary and specialty care throughout Nova Scotia. This goes beyond the numbers of doctors coming and going from our communities.

*It's about enhancing your access to see a doctor or other qualified care provider when you need to and where you need to.*

*It's about ensuring you can see a health professional in a reasonable amount of time.*



We are seeing results. Indeed, there is improved access to care providers each month.

You can read more about that here: [nshealth.ca/need-family-practice-data](https://nshealth.ca/need-family-practice-data).



# Our Context

When we talk about recruitment, a lot of the focus is on **how much** doctors are paid. This is important, but it is not the only factor to consider.

It is also essential to understand **how** doctors are paid. Most physicians are independent contractors; they are not salaried employees. Doctors Nova Scotia negotiates their fees and other terms with the Department of Health and Wellness through two main agreements: Physician Master Agreement and Clinical / Academic Funding Plan Agreement. At Nova Scotia Health, we do not pay doctors or determine how much or how they are paid.

While we do not control the number of physicians that are trained in Canada, NSH works with the province on the physician resource plan. This is a highly competitive field, and we are vying nationally and internationally to attract physicians to our province. Most of our new physicians are residents who are completing medical school in Canada. More and more, these new doctors want to work in urban areas. It is becoming harder to attract young people to work in rural areas and to keep them there. Another important factor to consider: Can their spouse find a suitable career?

**We're working hand-in-hand with communities to showcase the benefits of rural life:** *affordable housing, great schools, ample recreation and no traffic jams. We're also showcasing opportunities for spouses and the entire family.*

Our work is paying off.  
We are competitive in  
the market we recruit in.

This may surprise you. Health is an emotional issue and it is important to so many. It's important to focus on the progress we are making while acknowledging that there's still a lot of work we can do together.



**We are, for example, working on those things important to practising physicians:**

- innovative and flexible opportunities,
- work-life balance,
- interprofessional collaborative teams,
- sufficient volume to maintain professional competency,
- and access to professional development.

Together we are becoming more accomplished at what it takes to recruit, hire, and keep a doctor.

# Our Results 2016 - Present

**Physician Growth:** From April 2016 – 2020, we welcomed 550 new doctors to Nova Scotia. In addition, more than 140 health professionals (*such as nurse practitioners, family practice nurses, and social workers*) were hired to work as part of collaborative family practice teams. At present, there are 87 teams across the province supported by Nova Scotia Health; approximately 370 family physicians work in a collaborative family practice team.

**Physician Recruitment Team:** Our physician recruitment team currently has 12 members. In 2016, there was one staff person from the Department of Health and Wellness and three recruiters from the former districts. Nova Scotia Health has made recruitment and the work of physician recruiters a top priority and has invested to match the demands of this work. There are now two recruiters in each zone, identified leadership, and a specific recruitment focus for medical students and residents.

**Dalhousie Medical School:** Doctors are more likely to stay in communities where they trained. It's important to ensure access to medical school and specialty training.

In 2019, Nova Scotia was one of the only provinces to increase the number of spots available for entry-level medical students attending Dalhousie University. Another 16 seats were added bringing the total number of seats to 94. The province has also invested in more residency-training sites, adding a program to train family medicine residents in Northern Nova Scotia and an internal medicine site in Yarmouth. Family Medicine residents are now training in Southwest Nova Scotia, the Annapolis Valley, Cape Breton, Halifax and area, and Northern Nova Scotia.

Additionally, the medical school is increasing its longitudinal integrated clerkships across Nova Scotia. This innovative approach enables medical students to work across disciplines instead of focusing on one specialty or area at a time. It gives third-year medical students the opportunity to participate in a year-long program based in a community setting – and it exposes future doctors to the many benefits of rural medicine. Based on the success of the program in Cape Breton in 2019, a new site is launching in 2020 in the South Shore.



*The role of the recruiter  
is to source  
potential candidates,  
work with our partners,  
and support them from  
handshake to hire.*



## Our Results cont'd



**Programs and Partnerships:** We're working hand-in-hand with partners across the province to welcome new doctors to Nova Scotia and help them build a practice – and a home – here. Some of the initiatives include:

*The Provincial Recruitment and Retention Advisory Committee* was established to explore ways to better draw doctors to Nova Scotia and keep them here. Among the work this group has done is creating funding opportunities for grassroots recruitment programs (see below), established new recruitment team positions, and created a central table for all partners to keep up to date on recruitment initiatives.

Recruitment support is gaining momentum across the health system. *Doctors Nova Scotia* has established grants to help local physicians recruit to their areas. The *Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage's Recruitment Committee* has also created a grant to support community-led physician recruitment initiatives. In its first year alone, this program contributed more than \$100,000 to such initiatives.

The *Nova Scotia Practice Ready Assessment Program* assists doctors who have trained internationally to practice in our province, providing a pathway that previously didn't

exist for them. It allows them to obtain a license and ensures they have the clinical skills and knowledge to be successful here.

The *Nova Scotia Office of Immigration* has also launched an innovative program for physicians—the first of its kind in Canada. There are now two streams for physicians and their families to immigrate.

As of October 31, 2019, a new Master Agreement and Clinical / Academic Funding Plan Agreement was approved. These contracts dedicated \$75.3 million towards doctors' services and salaries. In 2020, the Government of Nova Scotia's overall investment in the health sector was \$4.82 billion. Under the new four-year agreements, family, emergency, and anesthesia doctors will become the highest paid in Atlantic Canada. Other targeted investments in specialties like psychiatry, obstetrics, and gynecology will bring Nova Scotian doctors closer to what their peers earn across the country.

Nova Scotia Health has launched the website [More than Medicine+](#). It provides timely, relevant, and detailed information for physicians looking to make a move. There is also an interactive toolkit for communities looking to recruit physicians.



# Our Partners

There are many organizations across the system involved in some aspect of physician recruitment. Nova Scotia Health and our partners work together to break down barriers, enhance existing efforts and relationships, and showcase Nova Scotia's value to doctors around the world. We want to thank our partners.



## Nova Scotia Health

NSH works with doctors and communities to identify potential candidates and recruit family doctors and specialists to live and work in the province. We recruit provincially, nationally, and internationally using a wide range of strategies including advertising and marketing, attendance at recruitment events, outreach at medical schools and coordination of site visits.



## IWK Health

As the other regional health authority focused on women, children, youth and family health, NSH is increasing its collaboration with the IWK in its work to attract and retain physicians. NSH partners with the IWK around reproductive care, community pediatrics as well as mental health programs throughout the province. This partnership supports these specialists in communities across NS and ensures comprehensive care regardless of geographic location.



## Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness

The Department of Health and Wellness (DHW) is responsible for funding health care spending in the province. They provide leadership by setting strategic policy direction, priorities, and standards for the health system. DHW ensures appropriate access to quality care through the establishment of public funding for health services that are of high value to the population and ensures the accountability for funding and for the measuring and monitoring of health-system performance.

DHW is responsible for provincial doctor resource planning and also funds Dalhousie medical school undergraduate and residency seats and incentive programs. NSH works with DHW and the Province of Nova Scotia to contribute to doctor resource planning and inform the appropriate allocation of opportunities in the province.



## Doctors Nova Scotia

Doctors Nova Scotia negotiates physician remuneration with the provincial government, and represents the collective voice of the medical profession on issues that affect physicians. Doctors Nova Scotia, with its dedicated Physician Advisory Team, provides direct support to physicians in the areas of practice and contract supports, orientation for new physicians, e-Health advice, physician wellness supports, and leadership development. DNS also offers benefits that serve as recruitment incentives like a health and dental plan, parental leave benefits and more.



## Maritime Resident Doctors

Maritime Resident Doctors (MarDocs) negotiates and enforces the collective agreement and benefits for residents. They are dedicated to improving working conditions and have a strong focus on resident well-being. MarDocs also partners with various stakeholders to advocate on behalf of residents.

# Our Partners



## College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia is the regulating body for the province's physicians and surgeons. They work in accordance with the medical act and its regulations. Their duties include: licensing physicians, investigating and resolving physician related complaints, monitoring and maintaining practice standards through peer assessment, and developing professional standards and guidelines to support medical practice and code of conduct. All physicians must be licensed with the college to practice in the province.



## Nova Scotia College of Family Physicians

The Nova Scotia College of Family Physicians is a chapter of the College of Family Physicians of Canada. They strive to improve the health of Canadians by promoting high standards of medical education and care in family practice, by contributing to public understanding of healthful living, by supporting ready access to family physician services, and by encouraging research and disseminating knowledge about family medicine.



## Dalhousie University

Dalhousie University is the province's medical training body and manages the provinces medical training programs and residency sites. Dalhousie works closely with NSH to ensure opportunities for medical students to work with physician preceptors who supervise medical students and residents. Dalhousie also manages the new Practice Ready Assessment Program which provides a pathway to licensing for International Medical Graduates.



## Nova Scotia Office of Immigration

Nova Scotia Office of Immigration is a provincial department of government that seeks to attract and retain newcomers to Nova Scotia. They are responsible for provincial immigration programs and also provides settlement support and services to newcomers.



## Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage

The Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage is responsible for contributing to the well-being and prosperity of Nova Scotia's diverse and creative communities. The department encourages community leaders and innovators who are at the core of embracing physicians and their families in the towns and communities of Nova Scotia to apply to the Culture Innovation Fund: Healthy Communities Stream for retention-focused activities.

## Our Communities

A critical component to the success of recruitment of physicians is the dedication of our communities in these efforts. See how communities put us ahead of the game in our toolkit. <https://recruitment.nshealth.ca/toolkit>



# Strategic Plan

Recruiting and retaining physicians cannot be ad hoc. A strategy is essential, and we have one. Indeed, much of the work discussed here is already underway.

Our plan and our approach, outlined below for you in Figure 2, is based on five major pillars. We call them: **Foundation, Identify, Recruit, Retain, and Continuous Improvement Feedback Loop.**



# Our Goals

1. Ensure full capacity. It's important for the physician recruitment team to be well-trained, well-informed, and well-supported.
2. Look beyond the ordinary. We will connect with as many physicians in as many places as possible.
3. Do what we're doing now – and more. We will create an environment where all the partners have a deep understanding of their role and an equally deep commitment for the work.



# Our Strategic Initiatives



Here's how we'll attain our goals – together.

## Foundation

Our Foundation stage is, quite simply, fundamental. It's about ensuring internal and external supports are in place. Excellent communication is critical at every step as are strong working relationships with communities and other partners. Another basic necessity: understanding the complex processes required for recruitment and success in this competitive market.

### Our foundational work includes:

- + Establishing a common vision, goals, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all partners. We'll do this by preparing a physician recruitment charter.
- + Managing information so we can make decisions supported by evidence, evaluation, and planning.
- + Continuing to build the capacity of our physician recruitment team.
- + Having productive and ongoing conversations with all our partners and work to define training needs on an ongoing basis so we have the right supply of physicians entering the workforce.
- + Supporting communities to play a pivotal role. This starts with a communications plan focused on physician recruitment.
- + Leveraging our partnership with the IWK Health Centre (*our other regional health authority*) on common recruitment needs and opportunities
- + Supporting equity, diversity and inclusion practices in our recruitment program

### An example of our work

In collaboration with more than 10 community groups across the province, we created a community toolkit that answers such important questions as how communities can be active participants in recruitment, how they can promote their town, and what supports are available.

The toolkit reflects the experience of other communities and offers practical help for those starting their journey into physician recruitment. See for yourself.

<https://recruitment.nshealth.ca/toolkit>

# Our Strategic Initiatives

## Identify

This section is about finding candidates locally, nationally, and internationally – and how to do this efficiently and effectively. We're starting close to home by strengthening the relationship between students and residents at Dalhousie Medical School. Graduates are likely to stay in the province where they train. It is also important to identify candidates in Canadian and international medical schools, especially those that have connections to Nova Scotia, and pave a clear path for them to obtain a license.

Physician networks must be carefully nurtured as well. Professionals relate to others in the same career path. We want to facilitate those connections.

It is important to be seen. We've expanded our presence at recruitment fairs, conferences, and campus tours in Canada and abroad. In response to the pandemic, we are now exploring new approaches including virtual platforms, digital marketing, and a larger social media presence.

### Our identifiable work includes:

- + Continuing to deepen relationships with Dalhousie University medical students and residents.
- + Establishing relationships with medical students outside the Atlantic provinces.
- + Tapping into existing physician networks.
- + Attending career fairs, conferences, and campus tours as well as finding new ways to reach doctors.
- + Reaching out to doctors looking for a vibrant practice and better quality of life through our [More than Medicine+](#) website.
- + Developing a compelling social media strategy.

## An example of our work



### **Meet Marcelle Saulnier**

*Physician Recruitment Consultant Marcelle is our expert in medical student and resident recruitment. She has a particular focus on Dalhousie University, where roughly 50% of our annual recruits originate.*

*Marcelle regularly meets with residents and medical students training in our communities, and provides a calendar of events that both educates and entertains. Since Marcelle joined us in 2019, we have been able to host more events and activities for medical students, residents, and local doctors such as kayaking, clinic tours, and even apple picking. This outreach, in turn, has increased opportunities to practice and created a deeper sense of community.*

## Recruit

Before recruitment can ever start, a doctor must be eligible for a license with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia. Once eligible, our recruiters can get to work. They will help physicians take the necessary steps leading to their first site visit. Our recruiters work with the physician, their family, and even immigration officials to roll out the welcome mat.

But recruiting is about more than medicine. The community is integral to a physician's decision to relocate or start a practice. Indeed, the entire family is important when making such a life-changing decision, so including them is central to our approach. Once a doctor is here, we rely on partners across the health system to ensure they have help setting up their practice.

### Our recruiting efforts include:

- + Developing consistent processes for physician recruitment throughout the province. This lets us be as efficient and effective as possible.
- + Increasing physician satisfaction by helping doctors settle into their new roles and their new lives as seamlessly as possible.

### An example of our work

Our goal is a smooth transition from hire to practice. We know a new physician interacts with many people across the health system. In a province our size, it's important that their experience with all areas of the health system is helpful, efficient, and consistent. Our physician recruitment team worked with our partners to create standard operating procedures to ensure everyone involved in hiring and practice start-up were clear on their roles.



# Our Strategic Initiatives



## Retain

While it is important to bring new physicians to Nova Scotia, it is equally important to keep the ones we have. This means we need to think about such things as workload, research, mentorship, and professional development. We also have to think about personal values like fit with the community and opportunities for spouses and children.

Support from community partners and local physician leaders is central to any successful long-term practice. These are the people and the organizations that interact with newly recruited physicians to make them feel at home, right where they belong.

Working with our community partners, we can help a new physician and their family establish roots within a community in many ways such as:

- Engaging physicians, physician leaders, and the community
- Organizing welcome events and welcome wagons
- Offering assistance to the entire family as they transition to their new home
- Reviewing ideas within the community toolkit

The opportunity to build a career and grow as a professional is a critical component in any retention strategy. For physicians in Nova Scotia, there are significant opportunities. These include:

- Training with the latest equipment and techniques
- Establishing academic or research affiliations through Dalhousie Medical School and other professional associations
- Taking advantage of mentoring opportunities for students, residents, and newcomers to Nova Scotia
- Developing leadership skills

Our retention efforts include:

- + Helping new physicians establish roots in their new community.
- + Assisting physicians with professional development and advancement





## An example of our partnerships at work

In 2020, a new Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship was launched on the South Shore thanks to partners across the health system who responded to local physicians' looking for more opportunities to work with medical students and residents. Such opportunities benefit future doctors and enhance the skills of our rural medicine experts. So they told us.



Dr. Nicole Boutilier

*“When we talk to physicians about living and working in Nova Scotia, it is opportunities like this that give us an advantage. Being able to showcase rural medicine to student learners is a credit to our dedicated physicians across the province. It helps us recruit highly skilled rural physicians, and it helps us retain the expertise we have. These system partnerships are really making a difference in Nova Scotia healthcare. Our community, foundations, and supporters came to the table to support the vision and transform medical education.”*

**- Dr. Nicole Boutilier,  
Vice President of Medicine, Nova Scotia Health  
Authority**



Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship students.  
Photo credit: NOW Lunenburg County

*“It is through the dedication of physicians across disciplines who are committed to excellent patient care and medical education that the South Shore LIC Program has been realized. The South Shore program is a fitting next step to solidify exceptional opportunities for medical education and elevate the unique learning experiences in rural Nova Scotia.”*

**- Dr. Gregory Thibodeau,  
Site director, South Shore Longitudinal  
Integrated Clerkship**

# Our Strategic Initiatives

## Continuous Improvement Feedback Loop

We want to know the work we're doing is effective. A continuous feedback loop let's us do that. With provinces and countries competing for the same talent pool, numerous incentives being offered across Canada and around the world, and regional differences at play, we need to have an in-depth understanding of the recruitment landscape. This can be achieved through ongoing evaluation of what others have to offer and identifying what is most important for physicians looking to set up a new practice.

We need to understand what makes a doctor choose one location over another. An evaluation plan enables us to measure and assess how well we translate our insight into action.

Our efforts to ensure continuous improvement include:

- + Reviewing the Physician Resource Plan with the Department of Health and Wellness to ensure it is current – and effective.
- + Evaluating the competitive physician recruitment landscape. Then evaluating it again.
- + Putting an evaluation framework in place to let us know how well we are doing and how we could do better.

### An Example of Our Work

When creating the More than Medicine+ brand, we spoke to many physicians about why they chose to live and practice in Nova Scotia. The responses they provided guided our pitch to others. Indeed, their words and experiences are woven into our marketing materials. Their impact: immeasurable. We'd like to share some of those with you.

[www.morethanmedicine.ca](http://www.morethanmedicine.ca)

<https://practiceinnovascotia.ca/>



# Conclusion

Together with our partners, we are putting in place programs and developing innovative approaches to physician recruitment that are consistent with – and slightly ahead of – work done in other Canadian jurisdictions.

In this fiercely competitive and global market, it is critical to break down barriers, work together toward a shared common goal, and tailor our offers to physicians so they will want to work and live in our wonderful province.

Ultimately, we know that recruiting and retaining physicians is about more than medicine+.

*One thing is certain:  
Doctors can practise  
great medicine here  
– and live an even  
greater life.*

