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**Hastings County and the Ontario Medical Association call on the Province to remove its restrictions on Family Doctors**

The County of Hastings called on the government to remove the restrictions for family doctors and to fully-fund the health care system in a resolution passed at council today.

The special resolution followed a presentation to council by Ontario Medical Association President Dr. Mike Toth where he talked about the state of medical services and how restrictions and cuts imposed by the provincial government will impact the ability of doctors to meet the needs of Ontario's current population and its growing and aging population.

Council invited Dr. Toth due to concerns about how recent provincial changes might impact access to family doctors in Hastings County. Since 2007, the County has invested in a program to recruit newly graduated family doctors in order to ease the shortage in its 14 member municipalities.

"We all are acutely aware that this is a critical time for Ontario's health care system. At present, there are 900,000 people in Ontario that are still without a family doctor," said Dr. Toth. "And the government is in the process of implementing unilateral actions to balance their budget."

One of those restrictions is the ability of family doctors to join team-based models of practice – the model in which new doctors are being trained – which councillors are concerned could impact its long-standing family doctor recruitment efforts.

"We have worked hard to put a recruitment program in place to ensure the residents of Hastings County have access to a family doctor and we're concerned the changes brought in by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will make recruiting more challenging," said Hastings County Warden, Rick Phillips.

Those restrictions include limiting the number of new doctors who can join Family Health Networks and Family Health Organizations to 20 per month; and only in areas deemed by the Ministry as high needs. There are nearly 200 communities identified by the Ministry where applications from doctors will be approved on a first-come, first-served basis.

Only four municipalities in Hastings County are currently considered high needs: Bancroft, Deseronto, Marmora and Lake, and Wollaston; while only parts of four others are considered high-needs – Carlow/Mayo, Faraday, Hastings Highlands and Limerick.

This leaves six municipalities not considered high needs – Centre Hastings, Madoc, Stirling-Rawdon, Tudor and Cashel, Tweed, and Tyendinaga – which makes recruiting physicians to these areas more difficult.

Dr. Toth said these restrictions, as well as others imposed on doctors, will make Ontario a less attractive place for new graduates when Ontario needs to be attracting physicians to care for the people without a family doctor – 14,000 in the South East LHIN alone – and the 140,000 new people who are added to the system every year.

“The OMA believes that every patient in the province deserves equal access to a family physician,” he said. “The reality is, the government doesn’t agree.”

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## Family Physician Recruitment Program

### Background

- Hastings County developed the program in 2007 to ease family doctor shortage across its 14 member municipalities.
- The program takes a long-term approach by providing financial support to medical students and residents rather than recruiting working doctors from other communities, which would be left in the lurch.
- The program provides \$150,000 in medical school/training costs over six years to medical students, residents or recent graduates of a Canadian Medical School, in exchange for a minimum of five years of family medicine service in Hastings County.
- By all measures, the program has been a success. As of May, the program has recruited seven family doctors who are currently practicing in Hastings County, serving the health care needs of about 9,900 patients. Two more doctors are slated to join in the spring and fall of 2015. There is already a waiting list of (200) patients for one of them.
- Three additional family doctors (one of whom would be part-time) have signed agreements to come to Hastings in the future. However, it is unknown how recent changes by the province would impact their decision.
- For a decade, the Province has been promoting a model where family doctors are paid per patient enrolled with them, rather than per visit. This allowed doctors to spend more time with patients who had more complex needs. Under this model, the number of family doctors in the province grew and more patients found a family doctor. All nine doctors who are practicing or will soon practice in Hastings County have joined family teams that work under this model.
- There are also two family practices in Hastings County with a salaried model, as well as a number of independent physicians who work on a fee-for-service basis.

### What's changing?

- The province is now restricting the number of family doctors who can join family health organizations that base doctor compensation on the number of patients enrolled with them.
- These family health organizations will not be able to add new doctors unless they are replacing a retiring or leaving doctor. No new family health organizations can be created.
- The province is allowing 20 doctors per month to be added to such family health organizations, only if they are located in designated high-needs areas. There are 500 family doctors graduating every year in Ontario
- There are nearly 200 communities identified by the Ministry where applications from doctors will be approved on a first-come, first-served basis. In Hastings County, communities such as Bancroft, Deseronto, Marmora and Lake, and Wollaston are classified as high needs with only parts of Carlow/Mayo, Faraday, Hastings Highlands and Limerick being considered high needs.
- Family doctors can join a salaried practice or work fee-for-service. Those pursuing a fee-for-service practice may have to consider the costs of starting up a new practice.
- In addition to the restrictions on entering family health organizations, the OMA has stated that other cuts to family doctors will likely discourage new graduates from pursuing family medicine in Ontario.