
IMPROVING ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE FOR THE RESIDENTS OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

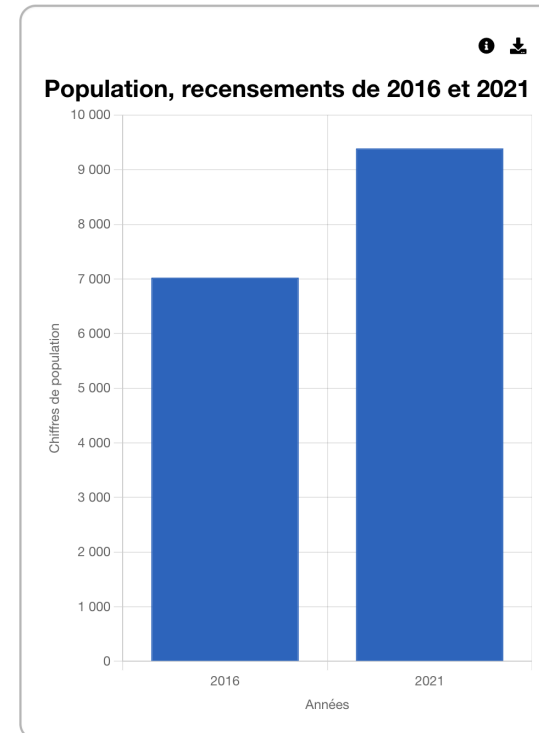
Asala Abbas, Mika Bains

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Context and Overview of Primary Care in The Blue Mountains

- Rapid and unexpected population growth: increase of 33.7% between 2016 and 2021
- Influx of new residents, mainly from Toronto
- Impact on health care and pressure on primary care services





Problems and Challenges

Current Challenges:

- Difficulties in accessing primary schools for residents
- Aging population, with a median age of 58.8 years
- Imminent retirement of a significant proportion of doctors

Impact:

- High rate of difficulty in accessing care for new residents and elderly families
- Shortage of doctors, aggravating access to primary care in the Town of The Blue Mountains

Proposed Solution: A lifestyle package for young doctors, incentivising settling in the Town of TBM

- Allocated Accommodation and Clinical Space:
 - Provide both housing and suitable clinical space for physicians: ex. home or residential building, with a primary care office on the ground floor).
- Lifestyle Benefits:
 - Cost-covered year-round activities:
 - Ski and Snowboard Pass
 - Golfing
 - Family memberships to local sports clubs and activities.
 - Discounted wellness services – spa, massage, etc.



Proposed Solution: A lifestyle package for young doctors, incentivising settling in the Town of TBM

- **Childcare incentives:**
 - Discounted childcare services for children of doctors in local licensed centres
 - Access to reliable and affordable childcare while focusing on professional responsibilities
- **Leverage provincial funding through the Northern and Rural Recruitment and Retention Initiative :**
 - The Blue Mountains has a Rurality Index for Ontario (RIO) score of 47, making the city eligible for \$86,335 in funding for physicians
 - Grey Highlands has a Rurality Index for Ontario (RIO) score of 45, making the city eligible for \$85,911
 - Subsidize relocation costs for physicians who move to the area
 - Provide student loan repayment assistance to recently graduated physicians who choose to settle permanently in The Blue Mountains



BRIEFING NOTE

Improving Access to Primary Care in Blue Mountains

To: Mayor and Council

Asala Abbas, Mika Bains

3 February 2025

BRIEFING NOTE TO BLUE MOUNTAINS COUNCIL

TOPIC: To provide an incentive for physicians to settle and practice in the Town of The Blue Mountains, and to stimulate, provide and improve access to primary care for residents of the town.

SUMMARY: The Town of The Blue Mountains is currently facing a shortage of doctors.

KEY POINTS

Rapid population growth

- Blue Mountain's population grew from 7,025 to 9,390 residents between 2016 and 2021, an increase of 33.7% in five years.
- This growth is largely driven by departures from major cities such as Toronto.

Impact on infrastructure and public services:

- The increase in population has put pressure on public premises and services, especially in terms of health care.
- New residents have difficulty accessing primary care and often have to travel long distances to seek care.

CONTEXT

Pressure on the housing market:

- Demographic change has led to an increase in real estate prices, making housing in the Blue Mountains inaccessible to some residents.
- This leads to a housing crisis.

Problems of access to healthcare:

- Many Blue Mountains residents are unable to access health care needs.
- There is a problematic cumulative effect between accessibility issues and access to health care, leading to deteriorating public health outcomes.

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Aging and growing elderly population: The median age of Blue Mountains residents is 58.8 years, and the majority of new residents intend to settle in the long term, exacerbating the demand for primary health care services.

Physician Retirement: A significant proportion of current physicians are approaching retirement. The number of family doctors in the region is already insufficient and this situation is expected to worsen with the retirement of older doctors in the coming years.

ANALYSIS

The Town of The Blue Mountains has taken several steps to address this crisis, including considering a \$100,000 budget for physician recruitment as early as the 2025 budget discussions. However, the situation remains concerning and requires coordinated efforts at the regional and provincial levels.

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES IN THE REGION

Neighbouring municipalities, facing the same challenges, have put in place incentives to attract doctors:

- **Collingwood:** An annual offer of \$14,000 for physicians interested in opening a practice locally.
- **Clearview:** Rent subsidies for doctors at the Creemore Medical Office.
- **Wasaga Beach:** \$100,000 in incentives spread over four years to attract new doctors, funded by revenues from the Wasaga Playtime Casino.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Provide housing and clinical space for new physicians

- Procure a house or residential building, either by purchase or rental.
- House and place newly recruited doctors in Blue Mountains and include an adapted clinical space on the ground floor, allowing doctors to work directly on site – or even in the town of Marmora, Ontario.

Using Outdoor Activities and Lifestyle Perks to Attract Doctors to Blue Mountains

Ski and leisure passes:

- Free or discounted season passes for Blue Mountain Resort and other ski resorts.

Annual access to outdoor activities:

- Passes for provincial parks, hiking trails, and recreational facilities.

Benefits to families and the community:

- Family memberships to sports and leisure clubs such as swimming, skating, golf, etc.
- Unique local experiences like ski workshops or activities in summer.

Partnering with popular spas to attract doctors to Blue Mountains

Discounted or free stay and spa services:

- Offer massages, thermal treatments and wellness services discounted or free of charge as part of the Doctors Package.
- Offer packages that include accommodation and access to the spa, allowing doctors to enjoy a relaxing getaway while exploring professional opportunities in the area.

Provide child care incentives to attract doctors to Blue Mountains:

Child Care Support Packages:

- Provide discounted childcare services for children of doctors in local licensed centres.
- Ensure doctors have reliable and affordable childcare while focusing on their professional responsibilities.

Family-friendly programs:

- Offer priority access or discounts for doctors to local on-call centres.
- Allow physicians time to fit family programs and activities into their busy schedules.

Leverage Blue Mountain's RIO score to access provincial funds:

- Use the Rurality Index of Ontario (RIO) as leverage to demonstrate Blue Mountains eligibility for financial support.
- Grey Highlands, with a score of 45, is receiving \$85,911 in funding over 4 years to support its rural health care initiatives.
- Provide funds to cover relocation costs for physicians moving to the area.
- Offer partial or full repayment of student loans for physicians who commit to Blue Mountains, (e.g., \$10,000 as part of their contract).

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(Learn More about the Rurality Index for Ontario Score | Northern Health Programs | Ontario.ca, n.d.)