
Memorandum

To: Budget Standing Committee

Cc:

From: Brian York, Director, Economic Development and Government Relations

Date: November 12, 2017

Subject: Re: Shared Service Opportunity for Physician Recruitment

At its meeting of October 2, 2017, the Budget Standing Committee (BSC) requested additional information on the feasibility of a shared service opportunity for physician recruitment.

Background

The challenge of physician recruitment is not a new one. In fact, most communities across Canada remain medically underserved. Government imposed earning caps and cuts to medical school seats and enrolments in the early '90s triggered a province-wide shortage of family physicians in Ontario, many of them emigrating south of the border. While most of Canada has struggled with the challenges of physician distribution, the City of St. Catharines has worked in tandem with local and regional partners to develop a multifaceted approach to the recruitment of family physicians.

City of St. Catharines Physician Recruitment Program

Since 2001, Economic Development & Tourism Services (EDTS) has managed a Physician Recruitment program in response to the shortage of family physicians in St. Catharines. To better serve the citizens of St. Catharines and advance the community's capture ratio, Council approved the St. Catharines Family Physician Recruitment Strategy in 2007.

Fully implemented in 2008 and renewed by Council in 2013, the recruitment and retention plan focuses on the following three initiatives:

1. An annual allocation of \$30,000 to establish a part-time Family Physician Recruiter.
2. Funding to assist with relocation costs (with maximum of \$5,000 per candidate).

3. Support the McMaster Niagara Family Health Centre located in municipal-owned commercial space at 18-24 Ontario Street (street level unit in the Ontario Street Parking Garage).

Similarly to how Economic Development and Tourism Services staff market the community for investment/tourist attraction, the Physician Recruiter performs the role of 'Community Marketer' focused specifically on general practitioners. The City's Family Physician Recruiter serves as a dedicated relocation resource should the candidate decide to practice in St. Catharines. The recruiter provides information about practice opportunities, spousal employment, municipal incentives, schools, real estate, sporting and cultural associations, and any other community or relocation information prospective physicians may request.

Niagara Region Physician Recruitment Program

The Niagara Region Physician Recruitment Program works in collaboration with all 12 municipalities to attract, retain and support new and existing physicians to Niagara. Since 2001, expenses for the regional program including a full-time contracted recruiter have been funded through an annual contract of \$100,000+HST.

On July 11, 2017 the Regional Public Health and Social Services Committee endorsed a staff report requesting the conversion of the contract for the Niagara Physician Recruiter to a permanent full time equivalent (currently set to expire on December 31, 2017). That request has been referred for consideration as part of the region's 2018 budget process.

A Collaborative Recruitment Approach

Family physicians are the first line of defense for a community's health care industry. A continued proactive approach to physician recruitment is necessary to ensure a community's basic healthcare needs are being met.

As the region looks to renew and provide permanence to its physician recruitment program, staff will work in partnership to review an alternative service delivery model aimed at streamlining service delivery and improve service efficiency of the respective programs.