



THE GOVERNMENT
Health Alliance

ALLIANCE OF MUNICIPALITIES AND DOCTORS PROPOSES RURAL HEALTH ACTION PLAN FOR OMA/ONTARIO GOVERNMENT 2000 AGREEMENT



FONOM



OMA
Society on
Rural Practice



SRPC
Ontario
Region



(Toronto, Canada. February 2, 2000.) - - An alliance of Ontario's municipalities, chambers of commerce, and both rural and new physicians today asked the Ontario Medical Association and the Government of Ontario to implement a Rural Health Action Plan as part of their 2000 negotiations. The Plan aims to help eliminate the physician-shortage crisis in Ontario's rural and underserved communities.

"The Government, the OMA and both Opposition parties have been committed for years to filling these vacancies and the 1997 OMA/Government Agreement had some significant successes," said Michael Power, President of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. "We're talking about building upon and expanding the parts of the 1997 Agreement dealing with physician vacancies. Our Plan provides them with concrete solutions and we are asking the Government and the OMA to take action on this Plan," added Power.

"Through the 1997 Agreement, a number of communities were approved for alternate payment plans (APPs). This would not have happened without the co-operation of the Government and the OMA," said Jay Aspin representing FONOM (the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities). "Members of the NOW Alliance believe the current negotiations provide a unique opportunity for the Government and the OMA to implement truly effective, sustainable and non-coercive measures. Our proposals are practical and can work if everyone pulls together."

Dr. Peter Hutten-Czapski, Chair of the Ontario Regional Committee of the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada and a family doctor in Haileybury, Ontario, convened the workshop of Alliance members in Huntsville on January 20/21, 2000. "During the 1997 Agreement, we learned three things: that the Ministry's APP criteria were too stringent; that the OMA needs to agree on how to convert existing fee-for-service physicians to APPs; and that key stakeholders (such as members of the Alliance) should be involved in

implementation," Dr. Hutten-Czapski explained. In January 2000, the Ministry of Health identified 415 family doctor vacancies in 100 communities. Three years ago, there were 100 family doctor vacancies in 68 communities.

A key component in the Action Plan involves improving and extending Alternate Payment Plans (APPs) where doctors are offered salaried positions in group practices. Recommendations include:

- ensuring an effective and sustainable complement of physicians in each APP. extending present APPs for family doctors beyond small towns to mid-sized communities of up to 20 physicians;
- extending present APPs for smaller northern communities to rural communities in the rest of Ontario;
- extending APPs beyond family doctors to include specialist networks, focussing initially on general surgery and psychiatry.

APPs allow a wide range of improvements for rural practice including: better on-call coverage, compensation for hospital services, improved working conditions, access and funding for continuing medical education and vacation time. "The existing system does not allow for these features in most rural communities and this is a main reason why doctors don't come. When they do come, they burn out and they leave," said Dr. Hutten-Czapski. The Alliance will take their proposal to both the OMA and the Government and urge them to consider it at the negotiating table.

Members of the NOW Alliance (Negotiating Ontario's Well-Being) include:

- Association of Municipalities of Ontario <http://www.amo.on.ca>
- Chatham-Kent Health Alliance <http://www.ckha.on.ca>
- Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities
- Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association
- Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce
- Ontario Medical Association Section on Rural Practice <http://www.oma.org>
- Ontario Regional Committee of the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada <http://www.srpc.ca>
- Professional Association of Internes and Residents of Ontario <http://www.pairo.org>
- Southwestern Ontario Rural Medicine Education, Research and Development Unit <http://ahsn.lhsc.on.ca/sworm/>

The 12-point Action Plan is available at <http://www.srpc.ca/librarydocs/12points.htm>

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