

November 18, 2024

Response to Senate Report - *Maximizing Medical Talent: How Canada can increase the supply of family doctors by 50% quickly and cost effectively*

The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada (SRPC) is encouraged by the release of *Maximizing Medical Talent: How Canada can increase the supply of family doctors by 50% quickly and cost effectively* (*Maximizing Medical Talent*) and the valuable information provided by the authors. This **report validates the physician shortage in Canada, particularly in rural and underserved areas**, and is strongly supported by the SRPC.

The need to increase the number of physicians in Canada, and specifically in rural areas, has been identified and supported by the SRPC since its inception. While one component of addressing the physician shortage in rural areas is for **international medical graduates (IMGs) to practise in rural communities** after being granted medical licensure, it is **also important to encourage Canadian-trained physicians to practise in these communities**.

The recommendations in *Maximizing Medical Talent* to support IMGs in having their credentials assessed and obtaining additional training to be eligible for medical licensure and practice in Canada could assist with physician recruitment and addressing physician resource needs. **While the SRPC supports the recommendations and the goals of the initiative, consideration of the following is important:**

- First and foremost, **training and assessment pathways MUST prioritize rural readiness** if the programs are going to meet the needs of Canada's rural communities.
- **Processes for assessment of credentials must be clear**, and the **additional training needed by IMGs intending to work in rural communities must be supported** to ensure they meet both Canadian requirements for medical licensure and the needs of rural communities.
- **Dedicated, sustainable funding is required to support the practice readiness assessment (PRA) programs**, particularly the time commitment of rural physicians who will need to support the supervision and assessment of internationally trained physicians.
- **Consultation and partnership with stakeholders is important to success**, including:
 - **Family medicine residency programs** – to determine financial, human (e.g., preceptors/mentors), and physical (e.g., space) capacity, particularly in rural sites. Additional needs of IMGs should be considered, as training methods in medical schools and residency programs in other countries may differ from Canada, resulting in varying needs.
 - **Medical Regulatory Authorities** – to ensure IMGs will be eligible for medical licensure and medical practice in Canada, and importantly in rural settings.
 - **Communities** – to discuss needs, availability and sustainability of preceptors/mentors, and mechanisms to support successful welcoming of IMGs in rural communities.

Continued investment in ongoing training and support for rural physicians, such as through the **SRPC’s successful National Advanced Skills Training program**, is essential to ensure the program is sustainable.

As the Federal government considers this initiative, it will be **critically important to ensure that**, through Canadian training programs, **Canadian trainees are supported to live, learn, and work in rural communities**. Avoiding the risk of creating a situation in Canada in which rural communities are seen as the “return of service sites” for those doing PRAs while urban sites are perceived to be more desirable is crucial to addressing physician resource needs for Canada’s rural and remote communities.

The SRPC is hopeful that the items outlined will be considered to assist in the success of this important initiative, as presented in *Maximizing Medical Talent*.