



NEWS RELEASE

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Rural Health Group Applauds Retired Doctors' Report

The Rural Health Action Group of the Memramcook-Tantramar Community Task Force today praised the work of four retired family physicians who recently declared that "Access to primary healthcare services in New Brunswick is in crisis."

In a paper entitled "Access to Primary Healthcare in New Brunswick," Stephen Hart, Russell King, Ian MacDonald, and Robert Tingley pointed out that more than 40,000 New Brunswick residents do not have a family doctor at all, and that many thousands more experience "unacceptably long wait times for services such as emergency department care and elective surgeries." They called on government, regional health authorities, healthcare educators, and professional organizations of healthcare providers to end the chronic shortage by:

- recruiting more family physicians;
- reorganizing office practices to serve more patients;
- increasing hours of accessibility for primary care;
- encouraging collaborative inter-professional teamwork.

Dr. Ross Thomas, a member of the Rural Health Action Group, characterized the report as "absolutely brilliant; its conclusions and recommendations are grounded in experience and common sense, he says, "...[and it] lays down reasonable guidelines."

Rural Health Group co-chair, John Higham, welcomed the report's mention of the particular needs of rural residents for equitable access to care. Given that fully half the population of New Brunswick lives in non-urban settings," he stated, "we have an urgent need for proactive programs to recruit and retain doctors, nurses, and nurse practitioners to provide quality service in rural areas."

Higham noted that a vision statement submitted last spring to Minister of Health Dorothy Shephard, on behalf of the region served by the Sackville Memorial Hospital, also stressed the need for government, healthcare authorities, medical and nursing schools, and professional societies to collaborate with local communities to achieve positive change.

"While we are pleased with Horizon's efforts to begin collaborative work with us in Memramcook-Tantramar, it is readily apparent that this won't be accomplished overnight," he emphasized, "but with such insightful support as the authors of this paper have expressed, the process can and must move forward as quickly as possible. They remind us that in 2002 the New Brunswick Premier's Health Quality Council outlined a provincial Health Charter of Rights which, among other things, assured residents of New Brunswick the right to access to care in one's local area. And I especially value their concluding statement: 'The prime consideration of all health matters should be the needs of the patient.'"