

City of Belleville

Report No: MPRR 2023-04

Meeting Date: June 12, 2023



To: Mayor and Members of Council

Department: CAO's Office

Staff Contact: Karen Poste, Manager of Physician Recruitment and Retention

Subject: Health Care Recruitment Policy

Recommendation:

That pursuant to the Manager of Physician Recruitment and Retention Report No. MPRR 2023-04, the Health Care Policy be Approved."

Strategic Plan Alignment:

Community Health, Safety and Security: Support and advocate for the establishment of responsive public health services and accessible medical care.

Background:

It is important to preface this report by reiterating that health care is NOT a municipal responsibility. The City of Belleville reluctantly but substantially stepped into the physician recruitment business to compete with other jurisdictions to protect the health and wellbeing of this community and our residents. The responsibility for the health care crisis we are now dealing with lies solely with the Ontario government and every resident, business and organization in the City needs to hold the Province accountable for resolving this issue. Despite the recommendations in this report, management wants to make it clear that the City should NOT be in the recruitment business for any health care providers and that this policy is only being recommended as a way of competing for the scarce resources that are available in Ontario. Council and the community must work diligently to lobby the Provincial government to make the much needed changes to the health care system to ensure ALL residents have proper access to immediate health care. Once the health care system has been properly fortified, this policy will not longer be required.

The City has been running a very successful family physician recruitment program for more than a decade and it has had a dramatic effect on the provision of primary health care in this community. 43 physicians have been signed to the program but more are needed to service our

growing population and as many long standing physicians retire. There is a shortage of family physicians in most areas of Canada and Belleville's situation is far from unique.

Although the program has been running successfully for many years, the City has not adopted a formal policy confirming the objective of the program and it's defined focus. Detailing what the program will and won't do and expanding it's scope in a focused way will help management market the program as effectively as possible.

In addition to the family physician recruitment program, the City has also sponsored a Bachelor of Science Nursing (BScN) scholarship program with Loyalist College and 11 students are benefitting from a \$10,000 incentive to work in Belleville after being fully certified as a Registered Nurse. A \$30,000 investment in an HVAC system to allow the expansion of the Belleville Nurse Practitioner Led clinic was also approved recently by Council.

The attached policy will look at many different options related to the attraction of primary health care practitioners.

Financial/Analysis:

The proposed policy (attached) looks at the attraction of four different types of health care practitioners: Family Physicians, Specialists (including ER), Nurse Practitioners and Registered Nurses. Although the scope of attraction could be widened significantly it has been focused to reflect available funding and the original objective of the program - to provide primary health care to Belleville residents. In the development of this policy, staff looked at many different options, alternatives and scopes, including eliminating the program all together. After careful review, management is proposing the following incentives:

New Family Physicians: Management recommends that the program be modified only slightly. No change to the terms are recommended, with the exception of allowing a physician that chooses to work in a Community Health Centre model of care be included as eligible for the program. (\$150,000 in return for a 5 year commitment of full time service).

Established Family Physicians: A key principle in the City's recruitment program has been not to entice or incent a practicing physician from another community to leave their patients and move to Belleville. This is a strong moral principle and should be continued moving forward. However, management is aware of some established physicians from outside of Ontario that are looking to move to Ontario because of the policies/situations they are facing in their current province. There are also times, when an established family physician has decided to move from their current province/county for personal reasons which have nothing to do with an incentive. These physicians are looking to Ontario as a place to settle and if Belleville had an incentive, it could tip the scales in our favour when it comes to deciding which Ontario community they will settle in. In this case, the incentive will cover moving and set up costs and not necessarily tuition or education reimbursement. Management recommends that the City offer a \$75,000 incentive paid over five years to an existing out of Province family physician that is interested in settling here and opening a full time practice for at least 5 years.

Specialists/Emergency Room Physicians: In the past the City has provided funding to attract a specialist to the community where a critical need had been identified. The City has funded a pediatrician, oncologist, dermatologist and a cardiologist previously. Management recommends that we formalize this attraction effort in the policy to allow for proactive attraction and recruitment. It is recognized that the critical need for certain specialties can change over short and long periods of time and as such, the policy needs to be flexible. Management recommends working with staff from Quinte Health Belleville General and Ontario Health to identify those specialists that there is a critical need for, and provide the option of a \$75,000 incentive to attract them to Belleville for a minimum five year return of service. In addition to attracting specialist physicians, management is recommending that we extend that funding to include ER physicians at Quinte Health Belleville General. With the shortage of Family Doctors and Nurse Practitioners, many residents are ending up at the Belleville emergency room. This has put an exceptional strain on the staff in the ER and they are running desperately short of ER physicians. To work in the Belleville ER, family physicians are required to have one additional year of ER training at minimum and not all doctors have this. Given the complex and varied nature of the patients using this centralized ER, a higher skill set is required. Management recommends that the City provide a \$75,000 incentive to ER trained family physicians that will take on a full time position at Quinte Health Belleville General. The funding would be payable over a five year period and would be in exchange for a five year commitment of service.

International Medical Graduates (IMG's):

IMG's represent a great opportunity for the City to attract physicians that are required to work in underserved communities as a condition to their license to practice in Ontario. Management recommends that they be eligible under the recruitment program to receive an incentive once they are enrolled in good standing with a Canadian Medical School completing their residency or observership requirements. The incentive would be up to \$150,000 paid in \$25,000 installments in exchange for a minimum five year commitment of service.

Established Family Physicians:

Although the City will not lure a family physician away from an existing practice in Ontario, management recognizes that the health care culture in other Provinces can cause physicians in these areas to look to Ontario for a change of practice. Management recommends that the policy allow for the provision of a \$75,000 incentive (paid over five years) intended to attract an established family physician from outside of Ontario, in return for a five year commitment of service to Belleville.

Nurse Practitioners:

Nurse Practitioners (NP's) are a tremendously underutilized resource in the health care system although that has started to change. A few short years ago, the City considered incenting NP's but the Ontario Association of Nurse Practitioners indicated there was no shortage of NP's, only a shortage of funded positions. Times have changed and hospitals, nursing homes and other health care facilities are using NP's as an essential part of the patient care team. The Province recently implemented a "Learn and Stay Grant" for NP's to encourage them to stay in the region where they get their education. Those that attend Queen's are eligible for this incentive if they practice in the Eastern Region which includes Belleville. Although, funding or an incentive is not required to support their education, it may be in the City's best interest to offer an incentive to any new fully licensed NP that is employed full time in Belleville. An incentive of \$10,000 is

recommended - \$5,000 when their employment at a Belleville job has started, and another \$5,000 after 6 months, in return for a two year commitment of service in Belleville .

Registered Nurses (BScN):

As mentioned earlier, the City had a program this year that provided a \$10,000 scholarship to nursing students who took the third year of the BScN degree at Loyalist. The scholarship was intended to help with their tuition costs while keeping them in Belleville after graduation. Since the adoption of the City's program, the Province has come forward and provided free tuition to BScN students under the Learn and Stay grant but there is still a critical shortage of nurses locally and staff recommend keeping this \$10,000 scholarship program in place.

Other incentives:

There has been a lot of talk about possibly establishing a city funded clinic that could be used to attract physicians to the community. Several regions in the province are offering that incentive but staff are not prepared to recommend this course of action at this time. Currently there is an excess amount of medical office space available in the City - empty space that is available at a reasonable price, even several locations where support services like reception, billing and nursing support are also provided by the operators of the clinic. Any physician looking for this kind of office and support can easily find it in Belleville and the City should not be competing with these private sector initiatives. An additional reason for not offering this incentive is the disadvantage it places on our existing physician base. These are a group of physicians that are funding their own practices and paying the full cost of running their offices. It would be unfair and frankly prejudicial to offer this incentive to new grads in addition to offering the \$150,000 scholarship. Instead, new grads can use the funding the City has provided to help offset the costs of office start up and equipment, if needed. Management is not recommending the City invest in the development of office space to accommodate new physicians at this time.

Recruitment Consultants:

As the recruitment business for physicians becomes increasingly competitive, the opportunity to use specialized consultants or "head hunters" for this service becomes more palatable. Management recommends that where a consultant can bring forward a physician that has signed with the City of Belleville, that a fee of not more than \$20,000 be paid. This service is to be financed out of the funds that would normally be paid to the physician. For example, if a specialist physician would be entitled to a \$75,000 incentive, they would receive \$55,000 with the additional \$20,000 paid to the recruiter. No exclusivity contract will be signed with any specific recruitment firm/individual and the City will consider all companies that represent physicians that would be eligible to establish in Belleville.

Financial Impacts:

The funding utilized for doctor recruitment (Elexicon reserve fund) is currently fully committed. The proposed policy will work within the framework of the existing budget and adjust the mix of incentives issued in accordingly (within the options available in this policy). If the program becomes oversubscribed given the existing budget, management will seek additional funding sources and come to Council with a request for their consideration.

Conclusion:

The purpose of the attached policy is to formalize the City's offerings in terms of attracting certain health care professionals. Ensuring management has clear direction when attracting professionals will allow us to target our efforts and be as efficient as possible.

It is also recommended that this policy be reviewed from time to time by management to determine it's relevance and the need to update it based on trends and changes in the health sector.

The policy is to be implemented subject to available budget and deviations from the policy should be brought forward for Council consideration.

Attachments:

[Physician Recruitment Policy](#)

Approved by:

Brandon Ferguson, Director of Finance, Treasurer
Matt MacDonald, Director Corporate Services
Rod Bovay, Chief Administrative Officer

Status:

Approved - 07 Jun 2023
Approved - 07 Jun 2023
Approved - 07 Jun 2023



City of Belleville Policy

Subject: Medical Professional Recruitment

Dated: _____, 2023

Reviewed:

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to guide and focus the City's efforts to recruit the most needed medical professionals in the community. With limited resources, it is important that the City target primary health care practitioners as they are the foundation of a proactive and healthy community for residents and businesses. In addition to the attraction of primary health care practitioners, the City may also choose to attract certain specialty physicians where an extreme need in the community has been identified and the funding allows.

In addition to targeting family physicians, the City will also review and assess the need for other supports that could impact the supply and availability of clinical health care practitioners in Belleville.

2. APPLICABILITY

This policy will apply to all City efforts to attract health care practitioners to practice in the Community. Although health care is not a municipal responsibility, the City has stepped up to attract primary health care practitioners because of the extensive need in the community. This policy will only apply as long as there is a need and funding and resources are available to support the attraction program

3. GENERAL

The City shall annually assess the need for primary health care practitioners and specialists in the City and determine how many (if any) are needed and will budget accordingly.

Family Medicine Physicians:

The City may offer a financial incentive for family medicine students, residents or recently graduated family physicians in the amount of \$150,000, payable in \$25,000 annual installments in return for a five year commitment of full time service to the City of Belleville. Family physicians will be required to operate a full-time community based clinic within the City of Belleville. This incentive is not intended to apply to family physicians that will work only at the hospital but it will support physicians that will work at a Community Health Centre or other organization where patients are rostered to the physician. This \$150,000 incentive will not be paid to an existing physician that will be leaving an established practice elsewhere in the Province of Ontario

Family Medicine Physician/Emergency Medicine:

The City may offer a financial incentive to a Family Physician Emergency Medicine Doctor in the amount of \$75,000 in exchange for a 5 year commitment of full time service to Quinte Health Belleville General Hospital (QHBGH). This incentive is to be paid in annual \$15,000 installments and is to be in place only while the shortage of CCFP/ER doctors at QHBGH is considered acute.

Specialist Physicians:

The City may offer a financial incentive for a medical student, resident or recently graduated Specialist Physician, where such skills have been deemed in critical need in the community. The incentive will total \$75,000 payable in \$15,000 annual installments in return for a five year commitment of full time service to the City of Belleville. Critical need specialties will be determined by the City in consultation with Quinte Health and other health related organizations (Ontario Health). Under exceptional circumstances, the City may consider paying an incentive of up to \$150,000 (ie Psychiatrists).

International Medical Graduates (IMG):

The City of Belleville will consider offering a financial incentive to a Family Physician International Medical Graduate (IMG) provided they have relocated to Ontario, are eligible to work in Ontario, and are enrolled in good standing with a Canadian Medical School and/or actively studying for/taking accreditation exams. The incentive can be up to \$150,000 paid in \$25,000 installments, in return for a five year commitment of service.

Established Family Physicians:

The City will not provide a financial incentive to a physician that is leaving an existing practice and patients in another community in Ontario to move to Belleville. However, Council will consider providing a \$75,000 incentive to any existing family physician that relocates to Belleville from outside of Ontario provided they are fully licensed to practice medicine in Ontario and provided they will open a clinic based practice here and will roster their own patients. The incentive is to be paid in \$15,000 installments in return for a five year commitment of service.

Nurse Practitioners:

The Province of Ontario currently provides free tuition for most Nurse Practitioner programs provided they stay in the region in which they were educated. In order to attract as many graduates from this program as possible, the City may provide a \$10,000 incentive for new graduates to choose a Belleville position. The incentive will pay \$5,000 when the student starts a position in Belleville and another \$5,000 after six months, in return for a two year commitment of service to Belleville.

Nurses:

The City currently offers a \$10,000 incentive for BScN students who are taking all four years of their degree at Loyalist College. The incentive is paid out at \$2500 when they start year three, \$2500 when they receive their nursing license and the final \$5,000 when they pass their probation with a Belleville employer. This program is administered through an agreement with Loyalist College and could be opened up to other Colleges if a need is demonstrated.

Recruitment Consultants:

Where a recruitment firm or individual brings forward a candidate for the family physician or specialist program and that candidate signs a return of service agreement with the City of Belleville, a recruitment fee may be paid. A maximum fee of \$20,000 per recruit is possible. In instances where a recruitment firm is used, the \$150,000 or \$75,000 incentive is capped and all recruitment fees shall be paid out of the incentive for the physician (ie. \$20,000 recruitment fee, \$130,000 incentive to the physician or \$20,000 recruitment fee, \$55,000 to the physician).

No exclusive contract will be signed with any specific company and the City will consider any and all companies that represent physicians that would agree to establish in Belleville.

City Council reserves the right to review every individual situation if warranted and may adjust the terms of this policy as needed to attract the health care professionals needed in the City.