

Increasing The Availability Of Doctors In Ontario

March 5, 2010

The Ontario government is introducing two new initiatives, the Northern and Rural Recruitment and Retention Initiative and the Postgraduate Return of Service Program, which will attract doctors to communities where they are needed.

These initiatives were created as a result of the changes made to the government's Underserved Area Program (UAP). They have been designed to help northern and rural communities with their unique challenges in recruiting and retaining doctors, while increasing access to doctors throughout the province.

Northern and Rural Recruitment and Retention Initiative (NRRR Initiative)

The NRRR Initiative will provide grants to doctors and new doctor graduates who agree to practise in a northern or highly rural community or in one of the five major northern urban referral centres (Thunder Bay, Sudbury, North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Timmins).

Rurality Index for Ontario (RIO)

Communities are determined to be eligible based on their Rurality Index for Ontario (RIO) score – which will be used to ensure funding is specifically targeted to northern and highly rural communities. The RIO score (which is used for a range of programs in Ontario) is based on three factors: population (count and density), travel time to a centre offering doctor care, and travel time to a centre that offers advanced specialty care.

Doctors who practise in communities with a RIO score of 40 or more will be eligible for this incentive fund. These communities face long-standing and complex challenges due to their geographic isolation and have difficulties recruiting and retaining health care providers.

The values of the grants provided to physicians are based on the community's RIO score – the higher the RIO score, the larger the grant provided to doctors.

The doctors will be required to practise full-time comprehensive care for four years in the community, holding hospital privileges and working in a primary care model (i.e. Family Health Team) where available and appropriate.

The incentive grants will be available to family doctors and specialist doctors.

Northern Urban Referral Centres

Doctors can also receive grants to set up practice in the five northern urban referral centres (even though they have RIO scores below 40) because they play a vital role in providing health care services in northern Ontario and face significant recruitment and retention challenges.

Postgraduate Return of Service (ROS) Program

This program will enable all communities in Ontario, other than the Toronto area and Ottawa, to recruit international medical graduates (who received medical training outside Canada) who have to fulfill return of service (ROS) commitments. Under ROS commitments, doctors agree to work for a designated period of time in a particular location in exchange for a postgraduate training opportunity in Ontario.

The Toronto area is defined as the City of Toronto as well as Mississauga, Brampton, Vaughan, Markham and Pickering. With the previous policy, medical graduates were required to fulfill their ROS in communities designated as underserved under the Ministry's Underserved Area Program.

The medical graduates commit to five years of service in a community. After graduating, the new graduates will be able to choose among eligible communities, and the terms of the working arrangements are then negotiated between the community and the physician.

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