

KEEPING CURRENT

January 28, 2025

Ontario Government Introduces Plan to Connect All Ontarians with Primary Care

By Lad Kucis

Founded in the 1920s, Gardiner Roberts LLP has grown to become a strategically placed mid-sized business law firm with a diverse client base which includes several of Canada's largest banks, public companies including mining, high tech and software companies, real estate enterprises, lenders and investors.

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On January 27, 2025, the Ontario Government [announced](#) that it will be investing \$1.4 billion in new funding to connect every Ontarian with a family physician or primary care team within the next four years.

These investments will be delivered through a new [Primary Care Action Plan](#), which is to be implemented by Ontario's [Primary Care Action Team](#). Led by former Federal Minister of Health, Dr. Jane Philpott, the Primary Care Action Team was formed on October 21, 2024, for the express purpose of improving access to primary health care.

The following is a summary of the new Primary Care Action Plan, including its key objectives, and how the Government will be seeking to accomplish them:

1. Connecting Ontarians to a Primary Care Team

- Creating or expanding 305 new primary care teams, which are health teams that consist of a family physician or a nurse practitioner, as well as other health care practitioners;

- introducing legislation that would establish standards for what Ontarians can expect when accessing primary care services, irrespective of their location in the province;
- providing regular public updates regarding the progress and performance of the Primary Care Action Plan, including in respect of such items as the number of people who have access to a primary care provider, the percentage of people who can obtain a primary care appointment either the same day or next day, the percentage of people who can access their health records online, etc.;

2. Making Primary Care More Connected and Convenient

- modernizing Health Care Connect, which is an online program that assists Ontarians without a primary care provider locate a family physician or nurse practitioner;
- connecting all persons on the Health Care Connect waitlist (as of January

1, 2025) to a primary health team by Spring 2026;

- setting regular performance indicators of primary care teams, including number of persons attached to the team;
- enhancing digital tools for providers and patients, including to improve patient navigation, modernize information sharing and improving the referral process;
- leveraging Health811 to view online health records and to book appointments with a primary care provider. To confirm, Health811 is a 24/7 telephone/chat service where patients can obtain health advice from a registered nurse or find health services or information;

3. Supporting Primary Care Providers

- adding and expanding upon primary care teaching clinics in collaboration with educational institutions and other entities;
- introducing targeted strategies to recruit and retain the workforce needed to support primary care teams;

Impressions

It will be very interesting to see whether the Primary Care Action Plan can meet its lofty objectives, as approximately 10 percent of Ontarians currently do not have a primary care provider. Regardless, it is encouraging that the Government is prioritizing the new plan, introducing a high number of new primary health teams and providing considerable funding.

Ultimately, however, sustained success will hinge on an ongoing commitment to all aspects of primary care, including a focus on the education of health professionals dedicated to primary care and the development of a strong infrastructure to support primary health teams, especially in northern and rural areas. Patient engagement,

including through the effective use of technology, will also be critical.

The new plan will also be aided by the fact that as of April 1, 2026, nurse practitioners will be able to bill the Ontario Health Insurance Plan for certain primary care services that could previously only be billed by a physician. This should improve public accessibility to nurse practitioners. For more information about this item, please see my recent [blog](#).

As for the timing of this (likely to be very popular) announcement, it couldn't be connected to an upcoming provincial election, could it? No. I didn't think so.

About the Author

Lad Kucis is certified by the Law Society of Ontario as a specialist in health law and provides advice and representation to regulated health professionals and other health care providers, in respect of all types of regulatory matters.

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