

For Immediate Release

Improve Working Conditions – The Not so Simple Solution to Retain Health Professionals

January 18th, 2024 – Every Northerner knows just how hard it is to access health care in Northern Ontario. Rural and remote communities celebrate when a new doctor moves to town. A doctor's departure, on the other hand, immediately leaves many without care.

One of the main reasons why some physicians are reluctant to practice in rural and remote communities in Northern Ontario is their limited ability to consult others, get second opinions, and obtain patient support on complex cases. British Columbia, however, offers a model to increase healthcare coordination to attract and retain more doctors and healthcare professionals in rural, remote, and northern communities.

The Rural Coordination Centre of British Columbia (RCCbc) has improved working conditions for physicians in regions and circumstances similar to Northern Ontario's. The latest publication from Northern Policy Institute, "*Rural and Remote Physician Services Coordination in Northern Ontario: A Brief Discussion Paper on the Model from British Columbia*" outlines the affordable and powerful changes BC made to strengthen their northern health network.

The RCCbc connects physicians to immediate specialist advice and peer support. It coordinates physician services, supports professional development, facilitates rural and northern-focused medical training, and manages rural locums for clinical deployment. On the public policy side, it facilitates rural health policy discussion by creating a network of rural physicians and healthcare professionals, rural residents, municipal leaders, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit leaders, provincial policymakers, and other community partners.

An organization mirroring the RCCbc in Northern Ontario could:

- **connect** physicians to rural and remote locums in Northern Ontario;
- **support accountability** by measuring the progress of programs and strategies, ensuring their implementation, and reporting on their impact;
- **support the coordination** of northern health programs and physician services;
- **reinforce the northern lens** in policy, leading to solutions targeted to the needs of rural and remote communities in Northern Ontario—not one-size-fits-all policies; and,
- **develop and implement programs** tailored to rural and remote Northern Ontario.

When RCCbc was created in British Columbia, early and sustained funding from the provincial government was in place. The same would be needed in Ontario. The health funding structure in Ontario is compatible with the RCCbc model, but (as in BC) the allocation of funding would depend on successful negotiations between rural and remote physicians in Northern Ontario (through the Ontario Medical Association) and the government of Ontario. Those two groups would have to agree to allocate some resources from the Ontario Physician Services Agreement to this new organization.

Want to learn more? Read the report here: <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/rural-and-remote-physician-services>

-30-

Media Interviews: NPI President & CEO Charles Cirtwill and the author, Bryanne de Castro Rocha, are available for comment. To arrange an interview, please contact:

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About the Author:

Bryanne holds a Master of Arts in Political Science from the University of Calgary, where she analyzed the relationship between sustainable development, environmental clauses in international trade agreements, and agricultural lobbying. Her Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in International Relations explored the measurement and conceptualization of sustainable development. She is also interested in the relationship between mining operations and Indigenous communities in Canada and abroad.

About Northern Policy Institute:

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent, evidence-driven think tank. We perform research, analyze data, and disseminate ideas. Our mission is to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts our communities, our province, our country, and our world.

We believe in partnership, reconciliation, collaboration, communication, and cooperation. Our team seeks to do inclusive research that involves broad engagement and delivers recommendations for specific, measurable action. Our success depends on our partnerships with other entities present in or passionate about Northern Ontario.

Our permanent locations are in Thunder Bay and Kirkland Lake. We currently have a satellite office in North Bay. During the summer months, we have satellite offices in other regions of Northern Ontario staffed by teams of Experience North placements. These placements are for university and college students working in your community on issues important to you and your neighbours.