



doctors
of bc

2024 PROVINCIAL ELECTION

Temperature Rising

Health Care Priorities
for BC's Doctors and
Patients

DEAR COLLEAGUES:

The upcoming October 2024 BC provincial election will be pivotal for patients, doctors, and all health care providers. Our health care system continues to face a series of significant challenges while also witnessing considerable innovation and change.

Health care is one of the most important election issues for British Columbians. BC's physicians and their patients face challenges every day – from long waits to see a specialist or for certain surgeries to overcrowded emergency departments. These challenges also underline the ongoing reality that many British Columbians still do not have a family doctor despite recent government efforts to improve the situation.

Despite being under considerable pressure, BC doctors, along with nurses, lab and diagnostic technicians, and other health care providers are working incredibly hard to deliver care to British Columbians. Doctors are also performing more surgeries than ever and are ensuring patients in emergency departments receive the care they need despite limited resources. But as BC's population continues to grow, our health care infrastructure and health human resources are continually under strain.

Doctors of BC wants to make it clear that a commitment to real and ongoing investment and change in our health care system is critical. The following document summarizes the key issues facing members, their patients, and the health care system – and we encourage politicians to focus on these areas for real lasting change.

We are posing five questions to each political party and request a response in advance of the provincial election to help inform BC doctors on the parties' health care platforms and key priorities and commitments. We acknowledge a great deal of work has been accomplished in our system in recent years, but ongoing commitments from government are needed to address the challenges that lie ahead.

Doctors of BC wants to ensure BC physicians are involved in discussions with government and partners, and that we have an understanding of how each political party will enhance the ability for front line physicians to be heard.

We hope the answers we receive from the parties to our questions will provide you with valuable information to consider ahead of the upcoming election. Whatever the outcome, we will continue to advocate for you and a strong health care system and are prepared to work closely with the party that comprises government on October 19, 2024.

With gratitude and appreciation,



Dr Ahmer Karimuddin
President, Doctors of BC
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OUR COMMITMENT TO TRUTH & RECONCILIATION

In alignment with the 2019 Declaration of Commitment – Cultural Safety and Humility in Health Services Delivery for First Nations and Indigenous people in BC, Doctors of BC is committed to advancing truth and reconciliation across the profession. Physicians have a significant role to play, and Doctors of BC will continue to collaborate with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities to advance cultural safety in medicine.

We are committed to developing a Truth & Reconciliation plan in partnership with Indigenous leaders that considers the historical role of the Association and profession, and our role moving forward.

KEY DIRECTIONS FROM DOCTORS OF BC'S 2024-2029 STRATEGIC PLAN

We proactively work with physicians to support their patients and be leaders in transforming health care.



Increase the influence of the physician voice.

Position Doctors of BC as a thought leader in health care system transformation to improve our members' lives, patient care, and the population's overall health. This will ensure physician participation and influence when important health care decisions are being made.



Promote physician health, wellness, and safety.

Promote a working environment where doctors feel physically and psychologically safe to provide care to patients and have access to necessary support.



Ensure fair compensation and provide business support.

Secure equitable compensation for all physicians, from all backgrounds and identities, from rural to urban settings, and across specialties. Further, we ensure access to business supports to enhance doctors' ability to run their practices.



Engage members on the future of the profession and the culture of medicine.

Collaborate to build an inclusive culture of medicine that reflects physician and patient diversity. We work to align the needs of patients with the needs of physicians, all while upholding high professional standards.

DOCTORS OF BC ELECTION PRIORITIES

1 Address the shortage of physicians and other health care providers

British Columbia is experiencing a physician shortage in many areas of health care. This is reflected in long waits to see specialists or when trying to find a family doctor. There are also shortages of other key health care professionals and team members: nurses, laboratory technicians, medical office assistants, and diagnostic technicians are a few examples. The problem is exacerbated by BC's growing population – we need to attract more doctors and other professionals each year just to hold the line.

BC needs an ongoing and extensive training, recruitment, and retention strategy to ensure British Columbia is the clear choice for doctors and other health professionals when deciding where they want to work. This also means making sure their work environments are safe and resourced appropriately, so they can deliver quality care to patients and want to stay. BC has a solid foundation in several areas, but given the current and future environment, BC requires more health care resources to deliver a high standard of care.

2 Improve access to specialists

Timely specialist access is a challenge for many British Columbians. Our health care system currently has roughly one million patients either waiting to see a specialist or for a specialty procedure/surgery in BC. Specialists also face challenges in getting timely access to appropriate tests and diagnostics for their patients. A long-term support plan is needed to help specialists address long waiting lists and improve access to diagnostic investigations. Involving specialists in health care planning is a key part of developing sustainable solutions such as system-wide access to team-based care.

3 Strengthen primary care so everyone has a family doctor

The recent Longitudinal Family Physician payment model has helped make longitudinal family practice more stable, sustainable, and rewarding, allowing more British Columbians to access care from a family doctor. However, more than 700,000 patients are still without a family doctor in BC. Ongoing support and innovative solutions are vital for longer term, sustainable models of service delivery in primary care and through efforts such as Primary Care Networks.

4 Update and expand our hospitals to reduce overcrowding

In many communities, BC hospitals face ongoing challenges of overcrowding and staffing shortages. This impacts the ability to deliver care in crowded emergency departments, especially when in-patient hospital beds are full, and there are limited options to discharge patients into the community. Physicians, health care leaders, and other providers continue to manage under these conditions, which can be exhausting and discouraging, and the situation is expected to be exacerbated by BC's growing and aging population.

BC needs significant improvements and investments in hospital infrastructure. Stronger measures such as establishing maximum length of stay benchmarks, overcapacity protocols, bed optimization strategies, and increasing access to inpatient beds, medical imaging, and operating and procedure rooms are desperately needed, along with a long term comprehensive and transparent provincial strategy that meaningfully involves physicians and other health professionals.

5 Reduce unnecessary forms and tasks for physicians

Every hour a physician spends on redundant or inefficient paperwork is one less hour spent with patients. Our health care system needs to prioritize patients over paperwork, and that means taking a hard look at all the steps and processes that physicians are required to do. Reducing the amount of time a physician spends at a computer screen or completing forms without material benefit means physicians have more time to do what they do best: take care of patients. However, this will require a broad system commitment to make meaningful and fast changes.

6 Expand support for rural physicians and hospitals

The challenges our health care system faces – physician shortages, access to specialty care, temporary emergency closures due to understaffing – are acutely felt in rural British Columbia. Rural areas also experience unique challenges that complicate efforts to train, attract, and retain physicians and other health care team members. The ER closures seen in recent months are indicative of the breadth of challenges facing these communities. Rural communities are known for coming together to meet issues head on and it is time for our health care system to do the same by providing long-term solutions to help rural communities and hospitals not only survive but thrive in the coming years.

7 Ensure our electronic record systems work with each other seamlessly

Our health care system is increasingly moving away from paper to electronic records. This is a positive step that will potentially help patients have greater access to their own information as well as ensure physicians and health care providers have the right patient information when they need it.

Unfortunately, BC has a myriad of provincial, hospital, and physician office electronic health record systems that don't always communicate with each other. This means additional work is required to get the most up-to-date information or there may be delays because information is missing or has been duplicated. Most patients are asked for the same basic information when they visit multiple locations or providers. Our system needs a strong commitment to ensure these systems will share information appropriately – and soon.



QUESTIONS FOR BC PARTIES:



- **What are your party's priorities for the healthcare system in BC and what role do physicians play?**
- **If elected, what would you do to address the shortage of doctors and other health care providers in BC?**
- **If elected, what would you do to help specialists tackle their waitlists and ensure patients have more timely access to consultation and procedural care?**
- **How would you ensure BC is investing the appropriate amount of money when it comes to health care technology and infrastructure?**
- **What does your party intend to do to address health care challenges in rural communities?**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – PUBLIC POLLING

In April 2024, Doctors of BC undertook an independent public poll conducted by Leger360 to determine the level of importance British Columbians place on health care. More than 1,000 people from varying demographics were asked several questions. The results yielded an interesting, yet not surprising, outlook given the current health care environment.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE RESULTS ILLUSTRATES:

Cost of living/affordability is the top issue for British Columbians, with health care coming in a strong second. **62% of those polled rated this as important.**

BC's overall health care system does not have a very high rating, with more people considering it **poor or very poor (34%) rather than excellent or good (26%).**

One-in-five British Columbians are without a family doctor, with walk-in clinics the most common alternative to primary care.

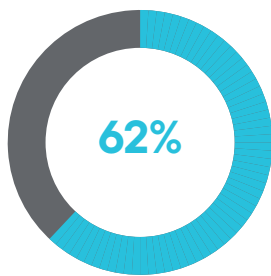
On a regional basis, **Vancouver Island has the greatest need for more family doctors.**

The top two suggestions to improve health care are: **hire more doctors (48%) and reduce wait times across the board (34%).**

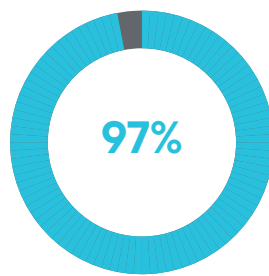
97% of British Columbians who were polled say doctors should have a voice in health system improvement decisions.

42% of respondents say having doctors involved in finding solutions is extremely important, primarily because doctors are on the front lines and know what does/does not work, as well as being in the best position to provide the patient perspective.

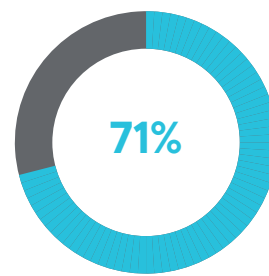
Health care ranks the second highest issue (behind cost of living/affordability) in the province, with



of British Columbians rating its importance.



of British Columbians see value in doctors having a say in health care decisions in the province.



The number one priority to improve health care for British Columbians is to make it easier for them to find a family doctor.

Thank you.

Doctors of BC supports more than **16,000 doctors** in British Columbia.
Thank you for taking the time to consider how their concerns may be addressed.

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