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Via email: admin@akblg.ca

Keith Page, President
Linda Tynan, Executive Director
Association of Kootenay and Boundary Local Governments
c/o 816 Sproat Dr
Nelson BC V1L 7B7

Dear Keith Page and Linda Tynan:

It was a pleasure to meet with you both and Council representatives McIsaac, McLaren and Hamilton at the Union of BC Municipalities convention on September 21, 2023.

During our meeting, I appreciated hearing and discussing the Association of Kootenay Boundary Local Governments' (AKBLG) concerns relating to the impacts of recruitment challenges in rural areas. I had committed to following up to provide you with the information specifically for rural health care recruitment and retention strategies and trust this additional information will be of interest.

As we discussed, it is recognized that recruiting and retaining physicians in smaller, rural communities is a challenge across Canada. The Divisions of Family Practice (<https://divisionsbc.ca/>) play a key role in the recruitment family physicians and locums and support physician retention through succession planning, coaching, medical record optimization and other initiatives that help deliver primary care more efficiently, ultimately enabling doctors to accept more patients within their practice. Specifically, and together with Interior Health, all the Interior Divisions of Family Practice leaders work together across the region as the Interior Physician Recruitment and Retention (IPRR) Committee which undertakes and leads the many important recruitment initiatives and retention activities. The IPRR also takes a primary lead role in working with the many International Medical Graduate placements completing various return of service arrangements in Interior communities, including those directly linked to the University of British Columbia's Family Medicine residency program across its distributed training sites in the Interior.

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I encourage you to connect with the Divisions of Family Practice in your communities as they are party to this important work to recruit, retain and maintain physician resources in your areas.

Through BC's Physician Master Agreement with Doctors of BC, the Joint Standing Committee on Rural Issues (JSC) was created to work on enhancing the delivery of rural health care by jointly addressing some of the challenging circumstances encountered by rural physicians. Through the JSC, physicians in rural communities are able to access a range of supports and incentives. Please refer to our Rural Programs: A Guide to the Rural Physician Programs in British Columbia for further information on these supports. (via <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/practitioner-pro/rural-guide.pdf>)

Physicians recruited to communities within the AKBLG may be eligible for the following rural incentives:

- Up to \$20,000 for new physicians under the **Recruitment Incentive Fund**.
 - In fiscal year 2022/23, 25 physicians recruited to communities in the AKBLG received this benefit.
- Up to \$15,000 to cover relocation costs under the **Recruitment Contingency Fund**.
 - In fiscal year 2022/23, 34 physicians received this benefit in AKBLG.
- **Rural Retention Program (RRP) Fee Premiums** are fee top ups ranging from 11.34% to 25.34%, depending on level of rurality and are applied to eligible compensation arrangements, paid to any physician practicing in an eligible rural community.
- **RRP Flat Fee**, including the **Rural Business Cost Modifier**, ranging from \$17,209 to \$38,455 annually for physicians who permanently reside and practice in eligible rural communities.
 - In fiscal 2023/24 to quarter one, 352 physicians in the AKBLG received payment under this benefit.
- Reimbursement of up to 50% out-of-pocket costs under the **Rural Canadian Medical Protective Association**.
 - For 2023/24, the Doctors of BC was able to fully fund this cost for physicians.

- Up to \$5,720 per year (family practitioners) and up to \$7,800 per year (specialists) to acquire skills and expertise for rural practice under the **Rural Continuing Medical Education (RCME) Individual Fund**.
 - In fiscal 2023/24 up to the first quarter of the year, 391 physicians received the RCME benefit. The **RCME Community Fund** provides funding for physicians as a community to participate and hold CME activities closer to home. This program provides AKBLG physicians with the opportunity for CME events such as Advanced Cardiac Life Support, and Advanced Trauma Life Support.
- Support through **Locums for Rural BC** to enable rural physicians to take reasonable leave from their practices for continuing medical education, vacation, and health needs.

Additionally, as part of BC's Health Human Resources Strategy, 70 actions have been identified with some specific to supporting primary care and physicians including:

- **#23 - Associate Physician Deployment Expansion** – expediting the integration of internationally educated medical graduates to support BC's medical services.
- **#26 - Optimize Pharmacy Services to Support Primary Care** – increasing the scope of pharmacy services to alleviate pressure and increase capacity of physicians.
- **#28 - Virtual Care and Telehealth Strategy** – expanding access to virtual care and telehealth, increasing efficiency and ability to connect with primary care.
- **#31 - Primary Care Network Locum Program** – deploying a new-to-practice locum contract for physicians to support service coverage in primary care networks.
- **#41 - Practice Ready Assessment (PRA) Program Expansion** – tripling the number of seats in the PRA program for internationally trained family physicians to support primary care across BC.
- **#43 - New to Practice Incentive Program** – supporting and incentivizing newly graduated physicians to provide full-service, longitudinal primary care.
- **#59 - Post Graduate Medical Education Expansion** – expanding the number of seats in UBC's post graduate medical education program.
- **#60 - Second Medical School** – establishing a second medical school at Simon Fraser University.
- **#63 - Undergraduate Medical Education Expansion** – expanding the number of seats in UBC's undergraduate medical education program.
- **#64 - Post Graduate Medical Education Re-entry with Return of Service** – supporting physicians to re-train in priority areas with a return of service in a high-need community.

Further information on BC's Health Human Resources Strategy can be found here:
<https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/BCHealthHumanResourcesStrategy-Sept2022.pdf>

I should also note that we continue to work with the Government funded agency Health Match BC (HMBC) to recruit physicians and other health professionals to work in BC's health care system. HMBC guides interested health care providers through the registration and licensing process, matching their skills and interests to opportunities in communities. More information on HMBC can be found here:
<https://www.healthmatchbc.org/>

Thank you again for your leadership to the residents of the area of Kootenay Boundary. I look forward to continuing to work with you as we move forward to improve health care services for all British Columbians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Adrian Dix', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Adrian Dix
Minister