**Submission to the Consultation Committee for NB Health Care reform**

**on behalf of The National Association of Federal Retirees**

**Fredericton District Branch**

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**March 29 2021**

**Introduction**

The National Association of Federal Retirees (NAFR) represents the interests of 170,000 retired federal public servants throughout Canada. In New Brunswick, there are 7,100 members of which approximately 1,850 reside in the Fredericton district. Given their demographic, our members are very concerned about the NB health care system. Consequently, in late 2019 and early 2020, we developed and distributed a survey to our members where we asked a series of questions regarding their experiences and level of satisfaction with the current health care system. Questions ranged from access to primary care, to long-term care, to telemedicine. The response was excellent - 1343 members throughout NB completed the survey of which 343 were from the Fredericton district. Given this level of participation, we have a high degree of confidence that the results are representative of our overall membership.

**Our Priorities**

The survey revealed that **lack of primary care was the most important issue** for members living in the Fredericton area (8.7% do not have a family physician, a level 2.4 times higher than 3.6% in the rest of the province). In addition, 74% of the Fredericton members who do not have a family physician have been on the waiting list for more than one year.

For those Fredericton residents who do have a physician, only 24.5% could get an appointment within a week of first contact versus 29% for NB members living outside of Fredericton (admittedly both numbers are bad and indicate a serious problem). Far too many of our members have to wait more than two weeks to see their family physician.

Our members are **supportive of their family physician working as part of a team** in a clinic with other health care professionals and would like to see this approach increased. This is particularly important for those whose family physician works in a solitary practice and who spends significant time at various hospitals.

The vast majority (98%) of the members surveyed strongly believe **nurse practitioners and pharmacists should play a more prominent role** in our health care system.

Members were also troubled with the **long wait times** in other parts of the primary care continuum; emergency room wait times, access to specialists, and surgical wait times (waiting years for a joint replacement). These all have a significant negative effect on our members’ quality of life.

Our members also believe that a **modern, uniform electronic record system** implemented across our province would improve primary care and enable more of our citizens to use walk-in clinics. This would also give patients the security of knowing that any health care professional treating them would have access to all their patient information.

We also support the **development and publication of a list of specific targets** for aspects of our health care system, such as surgical wait times etc. This would compare the current situation versus the target and permit government and New Brunswickers to monitor the performance of the health care system.

**Survey Quotes**

“Our family physician retired about 5 yrs ago and we were told it would or could take up to 10 yrs to find another because neither of us had any serious medical conditions so we hear of a new dr. in a small community that is an hours drive each way so we went there but would prefer to be in our own area. Not always great travelling.“

“I am 86 years old and I live in Fredericton. My family doctor is about 40 km out of the city and since I do not drive anymore, it is a real problem and very expensive to get to the appointments.”

“Expanding the scope of services to patients given by nurse practitioners/physicians assistants/other non-physician health care providers would be huge....to include prescribing medications, casts, minor stitches, etc.”

“Right now we have a family doctor but when he leaves we will probably not be able to find a family doctor. If there were electronic records a clinic would possibly be a viable option. Why is our health care system so archaic in the area of electronic records?”

“Signs at Dr. Everett Chalmers hospital emergency indicating 15 to 18 hrs waiting time is totally unacceptable. Putting people in crowded waiting room and thus exposing them to many viruses is unacceptable.”

“I worked in Health care for 4 decades, I witnessed the decline of service over time. I also witnessed the so called "expanded scope of practice" of various health professionals, and the dawn of hallway medicine in hospitals; and the hierarchy of health care growth at the top while the front line workers diminished in numbers and were overworked. The hierarchy of health care should not have non-medical staff in charge. They have no idea how to run hospitals

efficiently. They are not assembly lines.”

**Closing Comments**

The results are clear; the poor accessibility of primary care is cause for major concern among our members and is severely impacting their quality of life, particularly for those in the Fredericton area. We recognize that this situation affects all New Brunswickers of all ages and that it also affects our ability to grow our economy. To quote a member “The result (of past inactions sic) is a substandard health care system which does not provide the level of care expected by Canadians and which contributes to making NB unattractive to newcomers’. We ask you, is this acceptable?

Our members recognize and accept that major changes have to be made to our health care system; tinkering around the margins will only confirm public suspicion that nothing will ever change. Perhaps this time will be different.

The recent pandemic has altered the landscape; virtual doctor appointments are now the norm, and there appears to be acceptance that something of substance must actually be done to position our health care system for the long term.

We appreciate the opportunity for input on this important work of healthcare reform. We strongly urge you to ACT immediately on the priorities that emerge from this consultation. None of us are getting any younger!