

Notice to All Canadian Members of Parliament

Election 2019: A call for better access to rural health care close to home

September 12, 2019 - Despite the universality and accessibility principles of the Canada Health Act, people who live in rural and remote communities do not have equitable access to health care services. A recent Ipsos poll commissioned by the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) revealed that health care is a key issue in this year's election, with 50 per cent of those polled ranking it among their top three concerns.* An opportunity exists to narrow health disparities by providing care closer to home. Rural populations have a higher burden of illness and reduced life expectancy and are often older, poorer, and sicker than urban populations. Poor health affects both quality of life and economic potential. When rural communities do better, Canada does better.

Health policy decisions related to providing care in rural areas are often misguided by the use of evidence from urban health care models with little understanding of the unique rural context. Rural communities need relevant solutions that leverage federal, provincial, and regional collaborative opportunities to discover innovative approaches that work locally. For example, the expanded federal broadband initiative has the potential to improve access to virtual health care in rural communities. This depends on infrastructure development, education, research, and evaluation that must be made available through dedicated funding. A rural lens that can be used when federal initiatives are being considered can help clarify the needs of rural and remote Canada.

Launched in February 2017, the [Rural Road Map for Action \(RRM\)](#) provides a framework for a pan-Canadian approach to rural health care planning. Based on evidence and broad consultations, the RRM is a guide to improving the health and health care of individuals living in rural, northern, and remote areas of Canada. It highlights the need for rural-focused health care policies informed by research carried out by local experts. Funding to build rural research capacity and to support health improvement projects is urgently needed. Innovation that involves rural communities should be part of Canada's national health, economic, and research strategies. This approach is outlined in our document [Investing in Rural Health Care: An Economic Stimulus for Canada](#).

We urge each of you to make rural health care a priority. Rural and Indigenous populations deserve equitable health care and health outcomes. The time to act is now. Please commit to investing in rural health innovation to improve the lives of rural, northern, and Indigenous Canadians. We look forward to exploring ways to advance rural health care priorities with you during this election.

Thank you,

Dr. James Rourke, RRM Implementation Committee (RRMIC)[†] Co-chair, Society of Rural Physicians of Canada (SRPC)

Dr. Ruth Wilson, RRMIC Co-chair, College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC)

* Ipsos Public Affairs. *CFPC Family Medicine in Canada Report*. Toronto, ON: Ipsos; 2019. Available from:

www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2019-06/familymedicineinacanadareport-2019-06-13-v1.pdf. Accessed 2019 Jul 4.

[†] The [RRMIC](#) was established by the SRPC and the CFPC to address rural health care policies, planning, programs, and practice. The RRMIC is composed of senior leaders in the health, education, and research sectors. This includes the Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Nurses Association, Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, HealthCareCAN, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada, Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, Canadian Association of Physician Recruiters, and Canadian Association for Rural & Remote Nursing.