



Value and Volume of Family Physician Services

The backbone of Canada's health care

Family doctors have long provided the foundation of Canada's health care system and continue to do so despite the lack of necessary new investments on a systemic level. The foundational value and volume of services provided by family physicians is evident and their contribution to health care delivery must be sustained.



Principal source of comprehensive patient care



Among Canadians who report having a regular health care provider, **95%** say it is a family doctor.¹

Family doctors are Canada's foremost primary care providers. Among those in the country with a regular health care provider, **19 out of every 20 providers is a family physician.**¹ This is highly valued by Canadians.²

Consistently, for the past several years, about **80% of family doctors** who are three years into practice say they "provide comprehensive care to a current group of patients over the long term," comprising various types of primary care across the life cycle.³

Family doctors serve patients across settings in different capacities, **providing the majority of medical care**, including core areas such as **emergency medicine, home and long-term care, hospital care, addictions and mental health care**, and **maternal and newborn care** among others, considering social determinants of health in collaboration with community services.⁴



Medical services provided by family doctors in Canada



Proportion of national health spending on family doctors

According to Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) data, **family doctors provide 52% of all medical services in Canada,**⁵ while accounting for only **5.7% of total national health spending.**^{6,7}

Among medical services in Canada, **family physicians provide:**

- 49%** of hospital-based assessments
- 47%** of all psychotherapy/ counselling services
- 47%** of surgical assistance
- 34%** of obstetric deliveries (excluding Cesarean section)⁵

Clinical leadership and expertise in complexity of care

Family physicians are patients' trusted partners in care, applying unique expertise in managing complex needs of patient populations, providing continuity of care and clinical leadership in team-based settings.

On a monthly basis, **238 out of 1,000** people in Canada (almost 1 in 4) report **contacting a family doctor⁸**:



x 3.5

more likely than contacting a physician in another specialty



x 7.5

more likely than contacting a nurse



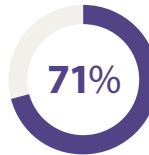
x 30

more likely than spending a night at the hospital

Family physicians are involved in the care of most patients with chronic medical conditions. In most cases they are the only health professional managing these patients⁹:



86% of patients with hypertension are managed by a **family physician only** (11% managed by family physician + other specialist)



71% of patients with diabetes are managed by a **family physician only** (24% managed by family physician + other specialist)



60% of patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are managed by a **family physician only** (21% managed by family physicians + other specialist)

Commitment and dedication to practice

Family doctors provide high-quality care despite challenging circumstances, often doing so at great personal sacrifice to meet the evolving needs of patients, families, and communities across Canada, including rural and underserved areas where there are few or no other physicians.¹⁰

- According to 2021 data, **family physicians were among the top three health professionals in Canada who worked the most paid and unpaid overtime** during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹

Family doctors are ready and able to adapt their practices in response to changing community and health system needs,¹² yet are the lowest-paid medical specialty despite the crisis in primary care.

- CIHI data show that average gross clinical payments per physician in 2020/21 were **24% more** for other medical specialists and **62% more** for surgical specialists, **compared to family physicians⁶**

Average gross clinical payments per physician (2020/21)

Family physicians	Other medical specialists	Surgical specialists
\$288,000	\$357,800	\$467,600

- This **pay disparity** is exacerbated by overhead expenses family physicians cover to run their clinics, resulting in even less take-home pay. As of 2017 **the average reported overhead expense was 27% for family physicians and 22% for other specialties**; this does not account for recent inflation.¹³

Canada's health care system is sustained through family physicians' support and their services, which need to be recognized and reinforced so the whole of the health care system remains strong.



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Need more information or advocacy support? Contact us at research@cfpc.ca with questions and comments related to data and healthpolicy@cfpc.ca for advocacy support.

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