



BRIEF

Ensuring a Sustainable Health Care System (2014)

In accordance with the objects of the *Registered Nurses Act* (2008), one of the professional self-regulating functions of the Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador (ARNNL) is to, in the interest of the public, encourage its members to participate in activities promoting the health and well-being of the public.

Registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) have long been advocating that health and wellness starts with individuals, families and communities. While the focus of health care resources and service emphasis remains primarily institutional-based illness care, ARNNL believes that attention must continue to shift to more comprehensive community-based services. These services must not only encompass the full range of health (from preventative to palliative, and throughout the lifespan), but must also address social determinants of health prioritized through community engagement. In particular, targeting youth is imperative as cultivating healthy attitudes and lifestyles begins at an early age.

We encourage the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to continue to promote programs that focus on nutrition and healthy lifestyles, build upon its Wellness Plan, and continue to support the Healthy Students, Healthy Schools initiative, Kids Eat Smart, and the Recreation and Sport Strategy. Adequately funded community-focused initiatives that support the well-being of all residents make a meaningful difference by addressing social concerns before they become health concerns.

Government has demonstrated leadership by embracing many initiatives that support access to health care services. This is evident through the development of strategies to support healthy aging, improve long-term care and community support services, prevent and manage chronic disease, and address the importance of mental health. ARNNL believes that for Government to boldly advance these strategies, it is imperative that it do so from within the framework of Primary Health Care (PHC). PHC is a cost-effective way of delivering essential intersectoral/interdisciplinary care in collaboration with the community at a cost that is affordable and therefore, sustainable. PHC also creates the infrastructure from which collaborative health care teams can excel in the efficient and effective delivery of quality client care in non-traditional settings.

Supporting collaborative health care teams that embrace RN and NP roles

Thus, through enhancing the utilization of RNs and NPs in non-traditional settings, we can also build a more responsive health system that ensures quality client outcomes and decreases wait times. Government's document, *A Strategy to Reduce Emergency Department Wait Times in Newfoundland and Labrador*, indicated that 56 to 86 per cent of clients surveyed were triaged as either non-urgent or routine. High volumes of low-urgency clients create overcrowding in the emergency department and lead to long wait times. The Strategy supports the use of community-based alternatives to the emergency department. One such example, in Budget 2014, is Government's investment in Community Rapid Response Teams to enhance health services and home support for seniors. Although this meaningful initiative will help to reduce the need for hospital admissions, it primarily targets a specific group. An additional option that would serve to benefit a large demographic of the population that is currently not targeted through existing initiatives would be to increase access to NPs in after-hour and weekend/walk-in services (e.g., Major's Path Clinic in St. John's). ARNNL's Public Awareness Survey (2012) revealed that 82% of those surveyed would like to see more NPs in their communities and 85% of those who utilized NP services strongly agreed that the quality of care provided was excellent.

Conclusion

To ensure a sustainable health care system, we need to continue to change our approach. A system-wide PHC approach implemented within collaborative team structures that enhance utilization of RNs and NPs will increase the capacity to significantly improve positive health outcomes, build the capacity of our people and communities, and focus on what is proven to positively impact health: social determinants and prevention.