



Patients Before Paperwork

February 2024


NOVA SCOTIA

Office of Regulatory Affairs
and Service Effectiveness

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Reducing Physician Red Tape

In 2020, physicians told us that they spend almost 500,000 hours a year on tasks that are considered 'red tape'.

This work is often done after hours, between patients or on the weekend.

To tackle this issue, we're making changes that include:

- letting healthcare professionals work to their full potential
- making forms make sense
- embracing technology
- improving legislation & by-laws, and
- updating processes.

By reducing or even eliminating this red tape, we give doctors back time. This reduces stress, improves their work environment and work-life balance. It could also mean that doctors have more time to do what they do best - care for patients.

More than 45 initiatives have been identified and are either completed or underway to reduce this red tape by 400,000 hours a year, roughly 1.2 million patient visits, by the end of 2024.

As of December 31, 2023:

250k

hours a year are estimated to have been saved from actions fully implemented and measured

45+

initiatives have been identified and are either completed or underway

63%

percentage towards the target to save physicians 400,000 hours

Note that hours saved are projected estimates based on completed initiatives and impact assessments that review time spent before and after the change. These numbers, in many cases, are then further validated by physicians themselves to ensure the hours reported are as accurate as can be.



Our Partners

Nova Scotia Health

Doctors Nova Scotia

Canadian Life and Health Insurance
Association

Office of the Superintendent
of Insurance of Nova Scotia

IWK

Workers' Compensation Board

Department of Health & Wellness

Department of Community Services

Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care
Service Nova Scotia

Public Service Commission

College of Physicians and
Surgeons of Nova Scotia

Halifax Regional Municipality

Government of Canada

Highlights from this Quarter

Meet the Physician Advisors

In December, in partnership with Doctors Nova Scotia, two Physician Advisors were hired to support the work to reduce physician red tape.

These practicing physicians bring new ideas and energy to the work and provide insight only possible by those who work in the system. They also help us estimate how many hours each action saves our physicians, validation which is key to our work.



Dr. Osama Loubani



Dr. Amanda MacDonald-Green



Province Awarded for Leadership in Red Tape Reduction

During Red Tape Awareness Week in February, Premier Tim Houston alongside his Atlantic counterparts was awarded the 2024 Golden Scissors Award for their leadership in creating the Atlantic Physician Registry. This registry makes it easier for doctors already working in the Atlantic region to practice in other Atlantic provinces.

On the Horizon: Reducing Red Tape in Nursing

As a direct result of the success of the work to reduce red tape for doctors, the Office of Regulatory Affairs and Service Effectiveness has begun exploring the potential to apply this type of burden reduction work to the nursing profession. The Office has met with boards of the Nova Scotia College of Nursing and the Nova Scotia Nurses Union and the Chief Nurses at the IWK and Nova Scotia Health to better understand the issues, identify solutions and seek support for the work.



Letting healthcare professionals work to their full potential

Enabling healthcare professionals to do the work they are trained to do is a no-brainer. Too often, there are circumstances where other health professionals are capable of alleviating pressures on physicians, but red tape prevents them from doing so. We're fixing that.

Expanding the Scope of Practice for Pharmacists



For the first time, pharmacists can now provide more publicly-funded health services for Nova Scotians to reduce pressures on emergency departments and the physicians who work in them. Thirty-one pharmacy locations around the province now provide some primary care to Nova Scotians, including treating patients for common illnesses and can, for the first time, test, diagnose, and treat strep throat.

Saves 44,560 hours annually

Enable Dietitians to Complete the Special Diet Form

Dietitians are now permitted to complete the Special Diet Form for Employment Support and Income Assistance recipients. Previously, only physicians could complete the form.

Complete, measurement underway

Enable Registered Nurses to Onboard New Patients

Registered nurses have been deployed at some collaborative care practices throughout the province to onboard unattached patients to primary care providers. These duties would previously have been performed by a physician.

Saves 4,240 hours annually

Enable the use of Physician Assistants in our Healthcare System

NS Health is hiring physician assistants to augment various care teams currently in place in order to expand physician capacity. Physician assistants work under the supervision of a physician and can do many tasks that physicians do, such as conducting exams and prescribing medication or treatments, freeing up physicians to concentrate on doing more of the things that only a physician can do.

Saves 51,230 hours annually

Empower Healthcare Professionals to Operate Within their Full Scopes of Practice in Primary Care

A pilot project is examining scopes of practice within some clinics to educate and empower all healthcare providers to undertake work they are trained and licensed to do. This will redirect some work from physicians to other healthcare professionals.

Saves **4,600 hours** annually



Making forms make sense

No physician trains to be a specialist in forms. According to physicians, paperwork is one of the biggest contributors to productivity slow downs and the erosion of job fulfillment. We're tackling forms head-on, making them easier to understand and faster to complete, reducing the overall time physicians spend on paperwork.

Improve the Employment Support and Income Assistance Medical Assessment Form

Efficiencies have been made to help income assistance clients access additional supports by improving the form completed by physicians. Additionally, this form has been added into the provincial electronic medical records (EMR) with auto-populate and direct submission functionality to reduce completion time.

Saves **19,200 hours** annually

Remove the Medical Report on Adopting Applicant and the Medical Report on Foster Applicant Forms

The requirements for physicians to complete a medical report for those applying to be adopted or fostered has been eliminated.

Saves **200 hours** annually

Remove requirement for the Disability Support Medical Form

The requirement for the Disability Support Medical Form to be completed by a physician has been removed.

Saves **290 hours** annually

Improve the Worker's Compensation Board (WCB) 8/10 Form and Submission Process

Physician input has informed improvements to paperwork and processes that the WCB uses for tracking and monitoring the medical needs and recovery plans of injured workers. The Primary and Emergency Care Report (formerly, Form 8/10), which is completed more than 26,000 times a year by physicians, is also being added to the EMR.

Complete, measurement pending

Evaluate the use of the Medical Status Report Form

A Medical Status Report form must be completed by a physician or a nurse practitioner when an individual applies for admission to long-term care. In July 2023, the Medical Status Report requirement was removed for individuals transitioning from hospital to long-term care. This form remains a requirement for individuals transitioning from community to long-term care; however, it may be completed prior to admission and is no longer a requirement to be waitlisted. The Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care continues to monitor these changes. To date, there have been no concerns.

Saves 100 hours annually

Reducing Physician Red Tape in the Insurance Industry

Physicians report insurance forms as a primary source of burden. The most frequently completed form is the Short-Term Disability (STD) Form, filled out approximately 5,000 times per year by physicians. A standardized STD form has been developed, reviewed, and approved in collaboration with the Office of the Superintendent of Insurance and the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association. This standardized form means 28 different forms have become one, which will be in the provincial EMR systems. Other forms, such as the Long Term Disability Form, will be standardized next.

Complete, measurement underway

Remove the Medical Report for Adoption Subsidy

The requirement for the Medical Report for Adoption Subsidy, which was previously required to be completed by a physician, has been eliminated.

Complete, measurement underway

Improve the Adult Protection Medical Observation Form

The Medical Observation Form is part of the adult protection assessment and requires a physician to assess if the adult is a victim of abuse or neglect, if the adult can protect themselves, if the condition is permanent and irreversible, and other relevant medical information. This form has been updated to remove sections that do not impact the overall quality of the assessment. It has also been updated to be more user-friendly.

Saves 5 hours annually

Remove the Medical Report for Voluntary Adoption Placement

The requirement for the Medical Report for Voluntary Adoption placement, which previously required completion by a physician, has been eliminated.

Complete, measurement underway

Making forms make sense (continued)

ACTIONS IN PROGRESS

Improve the Short-Term Illness Benefits application form for government employees

The short-term illness application form is being improved to make it simpler and faster to complete.

**MEASUREMENT
PENDING**

Improve Pharmacare Exception Status Drug Request Forms

Two high volume exception status drug forms are being improved for easier completion: Non-Insulin Anti-Diabetic Agents and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Therapy. Direct Oral Anticoagulants were recently made full benefit and that form is not longer required.

**MEASUREMENT
PENDING**

Work with Veterans Affairs Canada to Streamline Forms

Work with Veterans Affairs Canada to ensure that all forms are as straight forward and easy to complete as possible, as well as ensuring all medical professionals who are able to complete VAC forms, are allowed.

**MEASUREMENT
PENDING**

Fully Digitize the Medical Certificate of Death

Vital Statistics is digitizing more of its forms. One the next forms to be digitized is the Medical Certificate of Death. This digitized certificate will allow physicians to complete and submit it electronically from anywhere, and replace the current fax-based system.

**MEASUREMENT
PENDING**

Embracing Technology

In today's age, technology is an enabler. Embracing technology and its potential to improve the way our healthcare system functions is a vital if we want to graduate from archaic systems and processes. We're taking steps to adopt tech in smart, innovative and strategic ways so that it amplifies, instead of hinders, the work health teams do to care for patients.

Improve Physician Computer Access Through Technology

Proximity cards for computer sign-on, in addition to single sign-on capabilities, have been rolled out to emergency rooms and urgent care centres across NS, eliminating the need for frequent manual entry of login credentials. These technologies are also being rolled out to other NS Health facilities, expanding the reach of the time savings to other physicians.

Additionally, NS Health is moving to a lifetime passphrase policy for IT systems access, eliminating the need for new passwords every three months, reducing the rate of unsuccessful login attempts.

Saves 30,900 hours annually

Streamline SHARE (Secure Access Health Record) User Access Request Process

SHARE provides access to patient information such as lab results, imaging studies, and medication history for physicians and other healthcare providers. Improvements have been made to significantly reduce completion times for user access requests, which are required for providers on-boarding to the SHARE platform, and which were previously the source of considerable delays in physicians gaining system access.

Saves 330 hours annually

Enable the Use of Virtual Hallway to Streamline Specialist Consultation



Virtual Hallway is a technology platform that enables primary care and emergency physicians to consult with their specialist colleagues via telephone in a more efficient and streamlined manner. A pilot implementation of this technology delivered over 3,000 consults across three sub-specialties and resulted in an 82% reduction in unnecessary referrals.

Saves 1,300 hours annually



Creation of the Care Coordination Centre (C3) at the QE2 Hospital

Nova Scotia Health's C3 supports and facilitates the improvement of patient movement and care by providing a real-time view of system resources to support nurses, physicians, and decision-making at all levels. Patient flow, bed management and discharge planning, and staff scheduling have all improved because of this centre.

More centres will open in all provincial health zones in early 2024, improving physician workflows and saving time across the Province.

In Progress, measurement pending

Embracing Technology *(continued)*

ACTIONS IN PROGRESS

Improving the Exception Status Drug Request and Approval Process

Improving the paper-based submission and approval of exception status drug requests using technology to streamline and simplify the process.

**MEASUREMENT
PENDING**

Introduce Single-Entry Surgical Intake Model

A centralized intake model and digital tool has been introduced to more effectively and efficiently manage referrals to NS Health and IWK surgeons. This creates structure and organization in a space where it has been historically absent. It is anticipated that this model will be expanded to include most diagnostic imaging tests.

**MEASUREMENT
PENDING**

Eliminate Duplication of Test Results

The process for communicating test results (i.e., lab reports and blood bank reports) will move to an online portal, eliminating the need for paper-based reports.

**MEASUREMENT
PENDING**

One Person One Record

One Person One Record (OPOR) will replace or connect 80+ systems healthcare professionals use daily to record and view patient information. Many of these systems are outdated, slow, and information cannot be shared easily between them, taking up valuable time of healthcare professionals who, on average, login to at least five systems for a full picture of a patient's health information.

**MEASUREMENT
PENDING**

OPOR will allow healthcare professionals at any NS Health or IWK Health facility to access a patient's complete, up-to-date information at any time.

Improving Legislation & By-Laws

Legislation is one lever that can dramatically change the way doctors spend their time, get licensed, and move from one jurisdiction to another. These are simple, common-sense updates that allow some to work at their full scope of practice, and others to expand into new, meaningful territory.

Limit the Use of Sick Notes

The new Medical Certificates for Employee Absence Act prohibits employers from requesting sick notes from employees for the first two illness-related absences, of five days or less, in the preceding 12-month period.

Additionally, NS Health has changed its policies to significantly reduce its requests for sick notes for staff whose illness extends beyond five days.

Saves **67,760 hours** annually

Amend the Hospitals Act

The Hospital Act has been amended to allow nurse practitioners to admit patients to hospital.

Saves **36 hours** annually

Enable Other Health Professionals to Complete Capacity Assessments

Amending regulations under the Personal Directives Act will be explored to allow other healthcare professionals to complete capacity assessments.

In Progress, measurement pending

Introduction of the Atlantic Physician Registry

The creation of the Atlantic Physician Registry, where Atlantic Canadian physicians can opt-in to practice in another Atlantic province, reduces red tape associated with licensing requirements and processes for physicians looking to practice in Nova Scotia.

Saves **190 hours** annually

Enable Healthcare Professionals to Operate Within Their Full Scopes of Practice in Long-Term Care Facilities



The Homes for Special Care Regulations sets out requirements for all licensed long-term care facilities. A review of these regulations is underway to identify opportunities to ensure registered nurses and nurse practitioners are enabled to work within their full scopes of practice in long-term care facilities.

In Progress, measurement pending



Nova Scotia Health

Remove Hospital Co-Signing Directions

Physicians providing care to hospitalized patients (known as hospitalists) are no longer required to co-sign directions from other hospitalists operating in other health zones.

Simplify Hiring and Intake

The need for vulnerable sector checks for incoming physicians has also been removed as are already required to have background checks and are considered duplicative.

Streamline Privileging and Credentialing

By-laws governing privileging and credential processes have been adopted and will allow for streamlined, digitized application and renewal processes.

Allow Nurses to Sign Off on Vaccination Records

By-laws have been amended to remove the need for physicians to sign off on vaccination records, a task that can be completed by nurses.

*In total, these updates save **3,800 hours** annually*

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia

Enable Virtual Meetings

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia has transitioned a cohort of physicians in the province on time-limited defined licensure to long-term independent licensure, eliminating the need for physician supervision during the licensing process.

Accelerate the Evaluation of Internationally-Trained Physicians

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia has streamlined the licensing process for international medical graduates, reducing the average time required to obtain a license from two years to six months.

Enable Opt-In For Restricted Physician Licenses

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia has transitioned a cohort of physicians in the province on time-limited defined licensure to long-term independent licensure, eliminating the need for physician supervision during the licensing process.

*In total, these updates save **12,420 hours** annually*

Updating Processes

Needlessly drawn-out processes stifle healthcare professionals' ability to provide care in a timely manner and create backlogs and bottlenecks. By making small changes to improve processes, physicians are getting big gains back in time.

Streamline the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia's Complaints Investigation Process

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia has streamlined its complaints investigation process to reduce burden for both provider and patient to accelerate investigations with an objective of increasing early and informal resolutions.

Additionally, these changes will also decrease the time required for physicians to be present for interviews regarding complaints.

Saves 1,180 hours annually

Streamline the Peer Review Process at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia has streamlined its peer review program to improve process efficiency for physicians. Peer reviews are now more targeted and focus on a smaller number of participants based on a risk assessment.

A pause has also been placed on peer reviews for family medicine, in recognition of the burden on primary care in the current healthcare context.

Saves 630 hours annually

Simplify Credentialing at the IWK

The IWK changed its credentialing application process from a paper-based to an easy-to-access and completely online system.

Saves 780 hours annually

Simplify the Maternal Serum Screening Process

The IWK is eliminating the need for a second trimester maternal serum screening test during pregnancy and moving to a single comprehensive test during the first trimester. This improvement, in place in other provinces, upholds patient care and safety while reducing time for the patient, doctor and lab technicians.

Saves 770 hours annually

Updating Processes *(continued)*

Reduce Barriers to Gender-Affirming Surgery

Patients seeking gender affirming care no longer require two physician specialist referral letters, as they were considered duplicative for providers, and created long wait times for patients.

Saves 300 hours annually

Improve Administrative Processes within the Halifax Regional Municipality



The HRM is reviewing public program applications and Human Resources hiring requirements to understand where they interact with the healthcare system and what areas of red tape reduction can be investigated.

In Progress, measurement pending

Implement Mobile Primary Care Clinics



NS Health has launched mobile primary healthcare clinics, staffed by nurse practitioners and other primary care providers, to improve access to primary care services while also reducing demands on emergency departments across the province.

Saves 2,000 hours annually

Documentation Changes by Transitioning Alternative Payment Plans to Longitudinal Funding Plans

The move from Alternative Payment Plans to Longitudinal Funding Plans for family physicians has eliminated the need for family physicians to complete the Leave of Absence Summary, the Annual Activity Reports, and the associated documentation.

Saves 4,250 hours annually