



# Our North Star

## Creating a future-focused primary care system together

OCTOBER 2025

**afhto** ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY  
HEALTH TEAMS OF ONTARIO

| nous



## What are primary care teams?

## Primary Care Teams provide comprehensive and coordinated care to Ontarians in their local communities.

Primary Care Teams are collaborative groups of interdisciplinary healthcare and social services professionals, including family physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses and other healthcare professionals delivering comprehensive and coordinated care. They provide health promotion, disease prevention, management and treatment to individuals within local communities. They are Ontario's first point of contact with the healthcare system.

**AFHTO supports 189 Primary Care Teams including:**

**180 Family Health Teams,**

**5 Nurse Practitioner Led Clinics, and**

**4 other types of primary care team.**

**Strong primary care, delivered through team-based care models, leads to a higher-performing health system with better patient outcomes at lower cost by providing cost-effective, integrated, and comprehensive services.**

AFHTO's Primary Care Teams provide care to ~25% of Ontarians, including for marginalized and underserved communities and represent over 5,000 interprofessional healthcare providers.

Ontario's Primary Care Act and Primary Care Action Plan set a clear vision for primary care in Ontario – **to ensure every resident has access to a comprehensive, convenient and connected primary care team by 2029.**

Aligned to Ontario's vision for primary care, AFHTO has committed to **build high-performing Primary Care Teams that provide compassionate, comprehensive care, ensuring timely and equitable access for every Ontarian.**

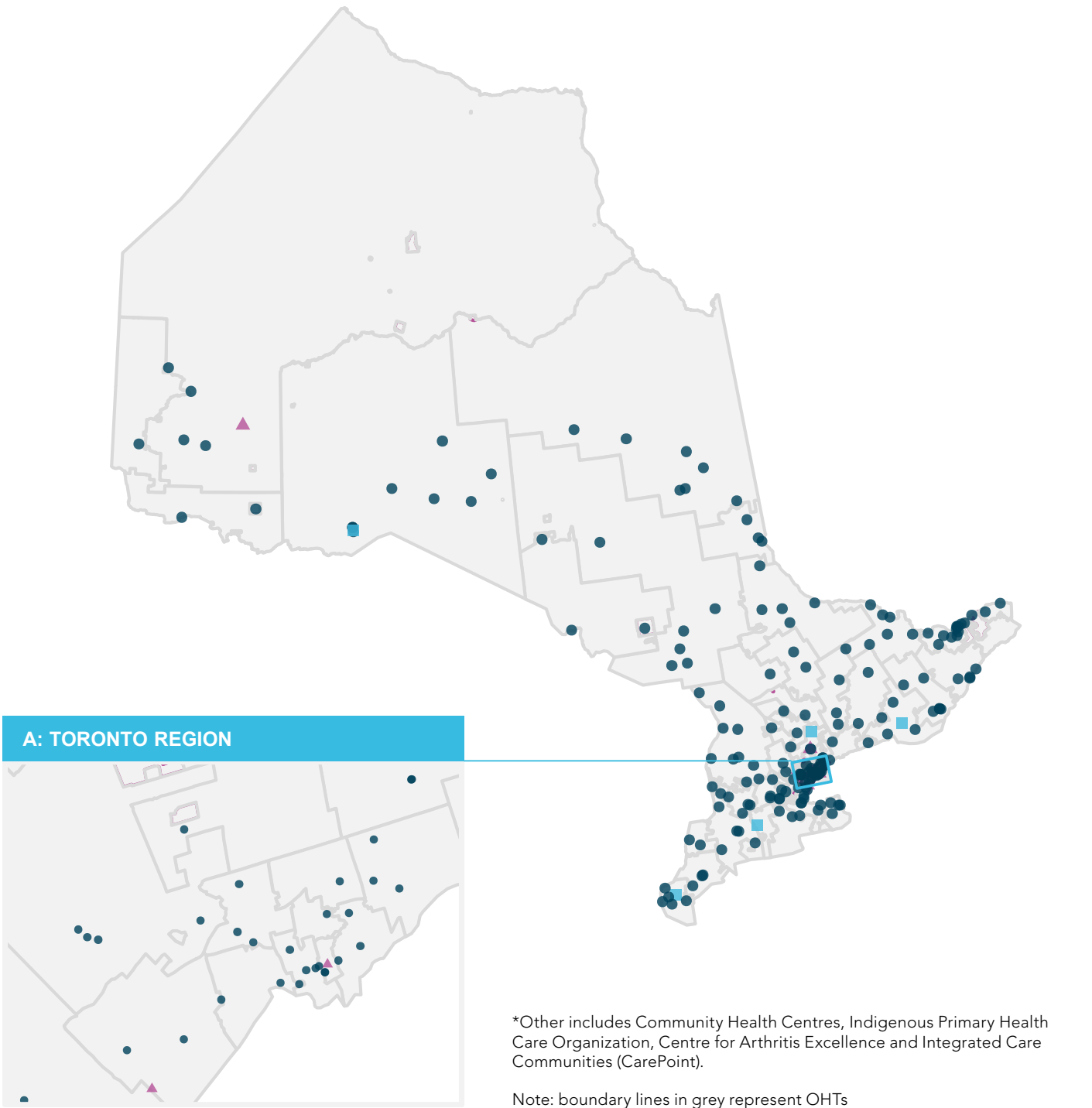
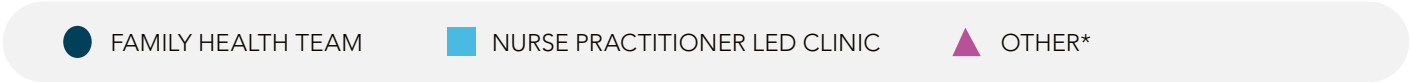
There are challenges that impact Ontarian health outcomes, primary care system performance and the functioning of AFHTO's Primary Care Teams. AFHTO has **committed to actions to improve these challenges, but some persist.**



## **Our collective call to action**

AFHTO and Primary Care Teams seek a strong partnership with the government to deliver on Ontario's vision for primary care - improving patient and provider experiences, health outcomes, equity and system sustainability

# AFHTO's network of Primary Care Teams operate in every community in Ontario.



# AFHTO is committed to improving primary care in Ontario by supporting Teams through strengthened governance, unifying their voice, leveraging investments and fostering collaboration.

A strong primary care sector leads to a higher performing health system with better patient outcomes at lower cost.

## AFHTO'S TEAMS



Attach more than **3.6 million** Ontarians - around **25%** of all individuals connected to primary care.



Leverage economies of scale to deliver **cost-effective care to serve rural and remote areas**.



Include **2,700+** physician leaders which comprises around **16%** of family physicians in Ontario.



Provide care to all Ontarians with a focus on **underserved and marginalized communities** (elderly, ethnically diverse, low socioeconomic, indigenous).



Bring together diverse healthcare professionals including **450+** nurse practitioners, **500+** nurses and **1300+** other interprofessional healthcare providers.





## What is Ontario's vision for primary care?

## The Government of Ontario aims to attach all Ontarians to a primary care provider.

The Government of Ontario recognizes that primary care is the foundation of Ontario's publicly funded health system and envisions a future where primary care stands as the cornerstone of a compassionate, accessible, and evidence-based health system. By empowering individuals with knowledge and fostering team-based care, Ontario is building a healthier province, one where every person's well-being is supported with dignity, equity, and excellence.

The Government of Ontario has defined this vision through a series of objectives:

### PROVINCE WIDE

Ensure 100 per cent attachment to a family physician or a primary care team by 2029, fostering a connected and convenient health system with an emphasis on team-based care.

### CONNECTED

Expand team-based care and fund new primary care teams that include interdisciplinary healthcare professionals working together to deliver comprehensive care.

### CONVENIENT

Decrease the wait time for patients to access a primary care appointment.

### INCLUSIVE

Connect more underserved communities and remove all barriers to accessing primary care for Ontarians from any linguistic, ethnic or socioeconomic background.

### EMPOWERED

Empower Ontarians to access all their personal health information in one digitally-integrated place.

### RESPONSIVE

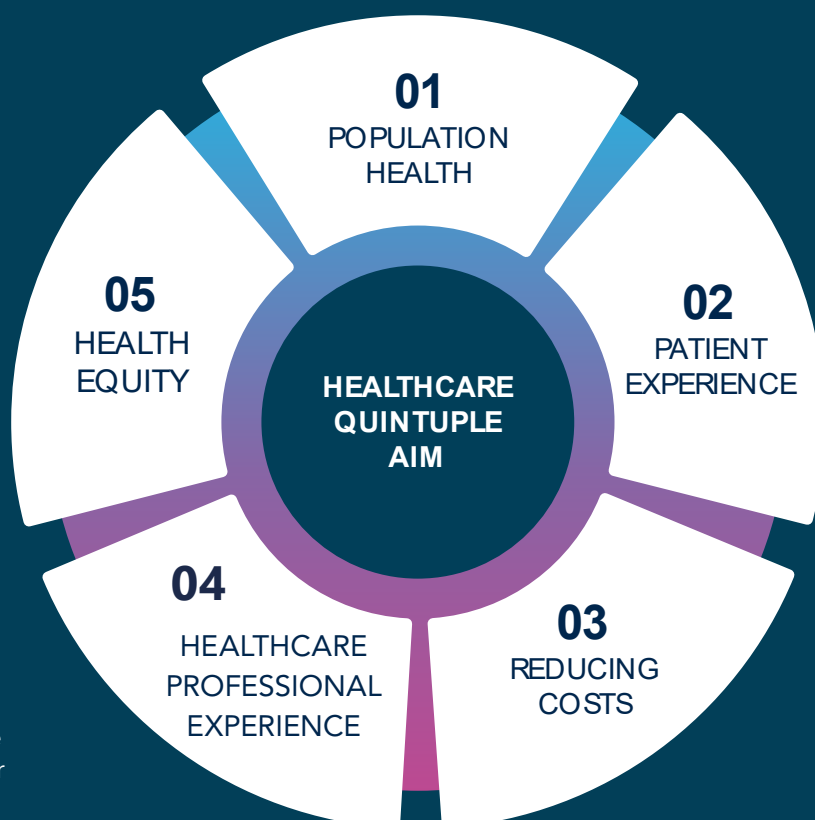
Create transparent reporting and insight into how the primary and broader healthcare system is performing and growing.



The Primary Care Act captures our long-held beliefs that primary care is fundamental for Ontario to deliver on the promise of the quintuple aim.

We believe Ontario should be a fair and just society in which everyone can access the care they need regardless of background, ethnicity, rurality or affiliation

We believe care should be proactive, preventative, integrated and evidence based to optimize health and improve patient outcomes



We believe patients should receive accessible, coordinated and continuing care

We believe healthcare professionals should work in a collaborative, integrated way to share the burden and care for each other so that they can care for others

We believe healthcare should be built on cost-effective and sustainable models of care for the next generation



What is the collective vision of Primary Care Teams and AFHTO?



**AFHTO's vision is to build high-performing Teams that provide compassionate, comprehensive care, ensuring timely and equitable access for every Ontarian.**

AFHTO has committed to goals to support Ontario's primary care vision.

**PROVINCE WIDE**

Attach another 500,000 Ontarians across the regions that Teams operate.

**CONNECTED**

Support the establishment and connection of new Primary Care Teams into communities.

**CONVENIENT**

Expand and enhance our quality improvement program to continuously improve Teams and share insights.

**INCLUSIVE**

Increase attachment for marginalized and underserved communities by 20%.

**EMPOWERED**

Improve Teams' digital systems and educate Ontarians to access and own their health information.

**RESPONSIVE**

Develop a standardized approach to collect and report practice outputs to improve accountability and evidence of impact.

# What are the challenges to achieving this primary care vision?

## Persistent challenges across funding, workforce, governance and care impact the primary care sector's ability to perform.

**2.5M**   
**ONTARIANS**

are without a family physician. This represents a **22%** increase from 2020.<sup>1</sup>

**19%**

**OF THE LOWEST INCOME ONTARIANS**



(as of 2022) did not have access to a regular family physician **UP FROM 16%** in 2020.<sup>2</sup>

**IN ONTARIO**

**12.3%**

of First Nations and Métis peoples reported not having a regular healthcare professionals compared to non-indigenous counterparts (**9.5%**).<sup>3</sup>

**ONTARIO RANKED**

**LAST**

In registered nurses per 10,000 people across all Canadian provinces and territories.<sup>6</sup>

While in the last 10 years, inflation has increased:



**25%**

**0%**

there has been a 0% increase in base funding for primary care teams

Family physician billings have risen:<sup>5</sup>

**6.1%**

The number of comprehensive family physician practices in Ontario decreased from



**71** IN 1993 TO

**64**

In 2022 per 100,000 people.<sup>7</sup>

**13%**

**OF ED VISITS**



could be avoided through primary care in Ontario.<sup>8</sup>

**LESS THAN**

**35%**

of **ONTARIANS** with a primary care provider can get same or next day appointment.<sup>9</sup>

**30%**

of **ONTARIANS** (as of 2023) had a follow-up visit with a family physician a week after leaving a hospital.<sup>9</sup>

# Challenges also limit Teams' ability to deliver leading, integrated and timely care.

AFHTO Teams continue to grapple with five key challenges which hinder their efforts to achieve their goals.



## GOVERNANCE AND SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

Consistent and efficient team operations are hindered by:

- unclear governance roles,
- unequal representation of Primary Care Teams on governance structures,
- poor escalation pathways, and
- decision-making at inappropriate levels.



## WORKFORCE AND PRACTICE OPTIMISATION

Primary Care Teams are limited from operating at full capacity due to:

- chronic staff shortages,
- low health workforce entry rates,
- misaligned provider skills to community needs,
- restricted scopes of practice, and
- poor workplace culture.



## CARE COORDINATION AND SERVICE INTEGRATION

System inefficiency, duplication and service gaps are due to:

- unclear system navigation,
- lack of resource-sharing mechanisms,
- inconsistent care pathways, and
- ambiguous provider roles.



## FUNDING AND FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

Long-term planning and high-quality care delivery is limited due to:


- inadequate primary care funding,
- lack of transparency in fund allocation, and
- inconsistent remuneration models.



## ACCESS, DATA AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

Limited visibility of available services, system performance and patient information is due to:

- limited data collection and analysis,
- low system interoperability, and
- inconsistent definitions of metrics (like access and continuity) for comparison.



What are AFHTO and  
Primary Care Teams  
doing to address these  
challenges?



# AFHTO is working to address the challenges faced by Primary Care Teams and achieve its primary care goals.

AFHTO has committed to multiple initiatives to improve Primary Care Team challenges. These include:



## GOVERNANCE AND SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

Expand an education and training program for EDs, CEOs and Boards, provided on an ongoing basis, to continually support the development of senior leaders (Executives and Non-Executive Directors).



## WORKFORCE AND PRACTICE OPTIMISATION

Create a quality improvement program and learning collaborative to better allow teams to continuously improve their work and share insights.



## CARE COORDINATION AND SERVICE INTEGRATION

Deliver an education program for the public and partners to build their understanding of the roles, services and value proposition of Primary Care Teams.

Facilitate common digital patient-centric solutions across Teams and enhance solution interoperability, to improve access to patient information for patients and providers.



## FUNDING AND FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

Collaborate with government to design fit-for-purpose funding methods (instead of proposal based) and guide teams on budget building and management.



## ACCESS, DATA AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

Develop a standardized approach to collect, define, analyze and report practice outputs and outcomes to allow for improved accountability, evidence of impact and continuous improvement.

# What else is needed to improve these challenges and achieve the vision for primary care?

## AFHTO and Primary Care Teams seek a strong partnership with the government to deliver on Ontario's vision for primary care - improving patient and provider experiences, health outcomes, equity and system sustainability

The Primary Care Act and Action Plan have taken strides to improve primary care - with dedicated resources, there is opportunity for more! AFHTO looks to partner closer with government to address structural and policy challenges that continue to impact primary care in Ontario.

### FUNDAMENTAL PRIMARY CARE ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE OUR AMBITIONS



#### GOVERNANCE AND SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

1

Directed structures and programming to support governance excellence across Primary Care Teams.

2

The PCN role is enhanced and is more consistent across Ontario (in terms of responsibilities, governance, capacity, capability and the way PCNs operate).



#### WORKFORCE AND PRACTICE OPTIMISATION



#### CARE COORDINATION AND SERVICE INTEGRATION

3

There is improved clarity on healthcare professionals' scope of practice and workforce planning, improving inter-professional collaboration, adoption of new models of care, and increasing capacity.



#### FUNDING AND FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

4

The role of primary care is recognized and funded appropriately (with funding shortfalls addressed and in line with OECD averages), with team-based care playing a growing role.

5

There is more flexibility in spending and longer-term funding, enhancing local decision making (towards global budgets) and allowing teams more flexibility to adapt and respond to community needs.

# What will be the outcome for patients and providers?

## A successful partnership between government, AFHTO and Primary Care Teams will improve experiences and outcomes.



### 01 POPULATION HEALTH

Marc's diabetes improved after joining a strong NPLC. A nurse practitioner, dietitian, social worker and pharmacist created a shared care plan, streamlined medications and timely follow-ups through digital tools - delivering coordinated care that kept him out of the emergency department and feeling supported.



### 02 PATIENT EXPERIENCE

After years of emergency visits for depression, Jaspreet joined a FHT. Her physician, social worker, psychologist and pharmacist coordinated care and developed a shared plan with regular follow-ups. With integrated support, Jaspreet's symptoms stabilized, and her hospitalization risk declined.



### 03 REDUCING COSTS

Data shows that patients who access team-based care better manage chronic illness and are less likely to attend the emergency department. This insight enables government to invest in proactive care models improving outcomes at lower cost by avoiding acute care.



### 04 HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Emma, a primary care nurse, faced burnout from rising patient loads and admin work. After joining a FHT, shared responsibilities, digital tools, and collaboration with a psychologist and pharmacist eased her burden - improving job satisfaction, reducing stress, and allowing more time for patient work.



### 05 HEALTH EQUITY

Underserved groups like Indigenous persons in Ontario face lower health outcomes and higher rates of chronic illness. Primary Care Teams enable continuing relationships with clinicians to manage chronic illness, offer healthcare education and prevent disease. These insights reduce emergency department risk and disease prevalence in underserved communities.

# AFHTO members are ready and eager to collaborate and drive change – more can be done together!

Together, we will create a Future-Focused Primary Care System

In July 2025, 100 senior leaders from 100+ Primary Care Teams came together to support the future of primary care.

The energy was palpable. Leaders expressed their hope for the future with optimism that the Primary Care Action Plan could revitalize the primary care system, leading to the highest performing level that Ontarians deserve.



Primary Care Team leaders are united and ready to drive change and shape the future of primary care in Ontario improving health outcomes for all Ontarians.

AFHTO is eager to partner with PCAT on system-level challenges and strive together to achieve the goals in the Primary Care Action Plan.



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DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NOUS GROUP