

By the Numbers: Doctors, Health Care, and Social Services - How Are We Doing?

Doctor recruitment seems to be a continuous activity for all communities in Ontario, likely Canada-wide for that matter. We recruit to both ensure our citizens have good medical care and to support recruitment of industry, businesses, a skilled workforce, young families, and retirees.

So, how are we doing? There are two ways to answer this question - in terms of standards or best practices, and relative to the rest Ontario.

The Patient-to-Doctor Ratio Act of 2007 (Bill 13, First Reading) was introduced to "establish a yearly target for patient-to-doctor ratio" and publish the actual ratio - no funding commitment was included. The target for the first year after the Act is passed is 560 patients per doctor (family practitioners, not specialists) and 450 in year seven. If the Act had been in force in 2007, we should be looking at a ratio of 490 patients per doctor in 2012 (year five). To meet the standard set out in the Act, and based on 2006 population figures, Grey will need to recruit 113 doctors and Bruce will need 81, for a total of 194. Right now, Grey has 1.5 and Bruce has 0.9 doctors for every 1,000 people; the average for Ontario is 1.9. The change in population based on the 2011 census means we need to recruit an additional two doctors for Grey and Bruce. Overall, Ontario is short 14,150 doctors as of the 2006 census and about 14,600 as of the 2011 census.

By The Numbers: What We Have - What We Need			
Based on 2006 Census Data	Grey County	Bruce County	
Doctors (2006)	76	52	
Doctors needed under Patients-to-Doctor Ratio Act	189	133	
Shortfall	113	81	
Number of doctors to be recruited (with no loss)		194	
Additional doctors needed due to 2011 population increase		2	
Present ratio of patients-to-doctor	1,216:1	1,257:1	

How are we doing in relation to the rest of the province? One way to measure this is using an index (or indicator) based on our "share" of all doctors in Ontario. So, if all available doctors were evenly distributed throughout Ontario, based on population, the index would be "1.0" for each community. Anything less than 1.0 means we have fewer doctors than expected, anything more than 1.0 we have more than expected. Again, this does not include specialists, family doctors only.

Index Showing Grey Bruce's Relative Position Doctors			
From 2006 Census	Grey County	Bruce County	Grey Bruce Combined
Index	0.94	0.91	0.92

Based on the existing number of doctors, Grey and Bruce are not doing too badly. It does not mean we have an acceptable patient-doctor ratio, just a reasonable "fair share" of doctors available. Which areas are doing better than us? Not surprisingly, bigger centres such as Toronto, Ottawa, Frontenac/Kingston, Peterborough, and Thunder Bay. Several rural areas have higher Indexes than Grey Bruce, including Manitoulin, Kenora, Rainy River, Cochran, and Timiskaming. Some of the counties or regions with lower Indexes than Grey and Bruce are somewhat of a surprise, and include Durham, Essex/Windsor, Peel, York, and Waterloo.