

By the Numbers: Doctors, Health Care, and Social Services - How Are We Doing? An update: 2011 to 2014

The original article was written in 2014 using data from the 2006 and 2011 censuses and Ontario Physician Human Resources Data Centre. This article updates the original with additional analyses and population projections to 2014.

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 positions we can take to answer the question - in terms of standards (or best practices) and relative to the rest Ontario.

Let's start with standards. In 2007 the Patient-to-Doctor Ratio Act (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.¹ 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, there should have been a ratio of 510 patients per doctor by 2011 (year five). To have met the standard set out in the Act Grey would have needed to recruit an additional about 100 doctors and Bruce about 70, for a total of 170.² Overall, Ontario was short close to 11,050 doctors in 2006 and 13,300 in 2011.

The study has been updated to 2014 (Table 1), with population estimates for 2014 based on each regions own population percentage increase from 2006 and 2011. The situation has not changed. Grey and Bruce (and the province) continue to fall short and the situation is not likely to get any better in the near future.

Based on the 2014 population estimates, Bruce's patients to doctor ratio has improved. The total doctor shortfall has increased by more than 30, to about 207.

Table 1: By The Numbers: What We Have - What We Need

	2011		2014	
	Grey	Bruce	Grey	Bruce
Population (actual 2006 and est. 2014)	92,568	66,102	92,725	66,864
Doctors (actual)	81	60	80	68
Doctors needed under Patients- to-Doctor Ratio Act	182	130	206	149
Shortfall	101	70	126	81
Number of doctors needed to be recruited	171		207	
Present ratio of patients-to- doctor	1,143:1	1,102:1	1,159:1	983:1

^{1, 2} This study assumes that each person in the province should have access to a family physician. The Act's title is a "patient to doctor ratio". The Act defines a "patient" as "an insured person as defined in the Health Insurance Act".