

INCREASING ACCESS TO DOCTORS AND HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS THROUGH FAMILY HEALTH TEAMS

The McGuinty government is improving health care for 2.5 million Ontarians by creating 150 Family Health Teams by 2008. Last April, the government announced the first wave of 69 Family Health Teams (52 individual teams plus three networks that include 17 teams). The second wave of 31, announced today, brings the total number of Family Health Teams to 100.

The Ministry is now accepting applications from groups wanting to be chosen for the final wave of Family Health Teams. This second and final call for applications opens today and will close on February 15, 2006. The application process is open to previous applicants that were not selected in the first wave and to new applicants.

Family Health Teams are a cornerstone of the McGuinty government's plan for improving primary health care. These teams will make it possible for many patients who are without a family doctor today to benefit from the care of a team of health care professionals, close to home, when they need them.

What are Family Health Teams?

Family Health Teams will improve patient access to health care by expanding the number and variety of health professionals available to individual patients and families. Individual Family Health Teams differ — both in size and make-up — having been designed by communities and providers to meet unique local health care needs.

Family Health Teams include doctors who work with other health care providers such as nurse practitioners, nurses, pharmacists, dietitians, physician specialists, social workers, health educators, mental health workers and others, depending on the size and the needs of the community they serve.

These interdisciplinary teams work together to provide better access to comprehensive care, including extended hours. After hours, patients can call a registered nurse through the Telephone Health Advisory Service for advice. If needed, the nurse may also contact an on-call doctor to discuss the patient's case, thereby providing access to health care 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

What Makes Family Health Teams Different?

Family Health Teams are an entry point to the health care system. Most notably, Family Health Teams differ from other models because they include a wide range of health professionals working closely together to serve the unique needs of the people in their community.

Family Health Teams offer a variety of health care services including: assessing the physical or mental condition of an individual, and the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of diseases, disorders or dysfunction.

The health care providers in Family Health Teams will emphasize education and disease prevention and encourage people to take an active role in their own health care.

Family Health Teams will:

- Provide a comprehensive range of health care services delivered by teams of doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists and other health care professionals to meet local health care needs
- Expand access to health care by providing services during extended hours and on weekends, and providing access to registered nurses after-hours through the Telephone Health Advisory Service
- Provide health information so that patients can make informed decisions on how to manage their health care needs
- Support the management of chronic diseases such as diabetes and asthma
- Improve the coordination of health care by better linking patients to other parts of the health care system, such as hospitals, long-term care homes, public health, mental health, and community programs and services
- Use information technology so health care providers across the system can share timely and secure access to test results and other important patient information
- Be governed by doctors, by the community or by a mix of the two, depending on the characteristics of the community.

How Family Health Teams Work

Patients in a Family Health Team will continue to see their family doctor when they need to. What will be different is that patients will also be able to see other health care professionals within the team, such as nurse practitioners, nurses, dieticians and pharmacists. Patients will also have access to their doctor or another doctor in the Family Health Team during extended hours. During evenings and on weekends, patients may also call the Telephone Health Advisory Service to speak to a nurse. In all of these cases, their own doctor will receive information on these visits or calls, so the doctor will always be up-to-date on the patient's medical condition.