

Promising Practices for Strengthening Primary Care

Expanded Primary Health Care Team



The challenge

In Weyburn, Saskatchewan, there are long wait times for primary care and a lack of discharge support from the hospital. This leads to an increased reliance on emergency departments (EDs) and hospital readmissions.

The promising practice

Expand the primary care team to include a primary health care registered nurse (PHC RN) to:

- Implement a triage system for medical office assistants to prioritize urgent patients.
- Coordinate appointments with front-end staff to provide same-day or same-week appointments.
- Provide patient care including care delegated by nurse practitioners or physicians.
- Manage discharge follow-up within 48 hours of hospital discharge.

By taking on a central role in patient care coordination, the PHC RN improved patient outcomes and made the healthcare team more efficient, providing the right care at the right time.

Example impacts

Reduced wait times for team-based care and reduced ED visits:

- Over a six-month period, the PHC RN managed 25–32 patients per day and completed over 1,700 tasks for providers. This reduced patient reliance on emergency services and shortened wait times for appointments with doctors and nurse practitioners.

Prevented avoidable ED visits through improved transitions of care:

- The PHC RN called patients within 48 hours of discharge to address concerns, clarify instructions, and coordinate additional services like occupational therapy or pharmacy support.

Enhanced complex case coordination and ED visit reduction:

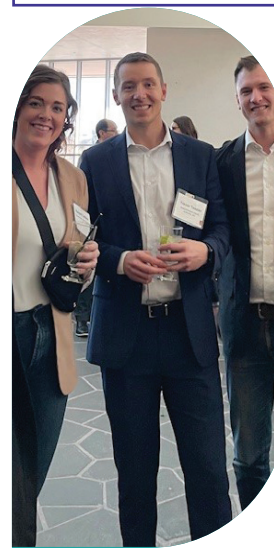
- The PHC RN initiated and led case conferences for patients with complex care needs, bringing together teams from acute care, mental health, and primary care. This ensured patients received support from appropriate care team members and reduced ED visits. One patient, for example, avoided repeated insulin overdoses after having their care needs aligned during a complex case conference.

Strengthening workforce well-being and improving patient access:

- The PHC RN's triaging toolkit empowered medical office assistants to prioritize urgent patients, which reduced wait times for appointments from 70 days in August 2023 to 27 days by mid-2024.

“We appreciate your follow up. We didn’t understand what was supposed to happen and your call helped clarify everything.”

- Saskatchewan Health Authority patient



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Keys to success

- **Team buy-in** and support.
- **Engaging** the right people to design and lead the process (e.g., multiple care teams, medical office assistants, patient representatives).
- **Transparency** in evaluation approach and sharing impacts to guide improvement.
- **Integration** of the RN role to manage patient care coordination and provide timely care.
- **Funding** of approximately \$5,000, if a clinic nurse is already in place. The primary cost savings will stem from reduced ED visits and hospital readmissions.



Lessons learned

- Be open to adjustments and re-evaluate as needed.
- Stay committed even when challenges arise.
- Engage team members to champion and ensure the work is meaningful and enjoyable.

How can I learn more?

Contact the organization.

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This work was supported by Healthcare Excellence Canada (HEC). HEC is an independent, not-for-profit charity funded primarily by Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of Health Canada. Those preparing and/or contributing to this promising practice summary disclaim all liability or warranty of any kind, whether express or implied.

Why was this summary created?

Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA), participated in Healthcare Excellence Canada's (HEC) Strengthening Primary Care (SPC) program. SPC brought together 20 primary care organizations from across Canada to advance practices to improve access to safe, including culturally safe, team-based primary care.

This promising practice summary was co-produced with SHA to help others learn about their work and generate discussion about how similar approaches could be adapted and applied elsewhere.

