

# Promising Practices for Strengthening Primary Care

## Pathways from Emergency to Primary Care



### The challenge

Same-day/next-day access to primary healthcare in Neil's Harbour, Nova Scotia (population approximately 3,500) is limited, adding increased demand in the emergency department (ED) for issues that could be managed in primary care (low-acuity patients).

### The promising practice

To ensure that patients receive the timely care that they need in the most appropriate setting, a Registered Nurse (RN) prescriber was added to the primary care team. An RN prescriber works as part of the primary care team and can prescribe medications and devices (such as compression therapy) and order relevant tests within their specific area of practice.

### More about the promising practice

#### The RN prescriber:

- Provides care for low-acuity patients who were triaged from the ED to the primary care clinic for a same-day or/next-day appointment.
- Improves patient flow, quality and patient safety by playing a unique role within the primary care team.

### Example Impacts

#### Between May - October 2024:

- 23 percent of patients presented with less urgent and non-urgent issues based on Canadian Triage and Acuity Score (CTAS) 4 and 5 were triaged to the primary care clinic for same or next-day appointments.
- In addition to the patients transferred from the ED, an additional 171 appointments were booked through the primary care clinic for a same-day appointment with the RN prescriber. This potentially prevented patients from seeking care in the ED.
- Patients and caregivers shared that they were happy with the care they received.
- Providers shared that the practice has enabled them to better meet the needs of the patients and has improved their work satisfaction.

An operational framework and supportive policies are being created to help sustain and spread the practice to other rural settings in Nova Scotia.

**"I have discovered my role is different than the other providers but complementary in providing improved access for patients in the most appropriate setting."**

- RN prescriber



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## Potential future impacts

- Improved team collaboration and working to full scope of practice.
- Continued improvement in access to team-based primary care.

## Keys to success

- **Access to an Electronic Medical Record (EMR)** enabled the RN prescriber to have patient information needed to support safe, appropriate transfer from ED to primary care clinic.
- **Education for staff**, including building understanding of the role and scope of practice for the RN prescriber and team members (via a process map), and how to use the associated technology.
- **Community engagement sessions** were imperative to understand the patient experience and current challenges navigating the healthcare system. Patient input gathered through these sessions informed our educational materials and resources for the public.
- **Funding** for community engagement sessions, staff education, equipment and technology.
- **Meaningful partnerships** with communities and health care providers to make informed and collective decision-making on change ideas and process improvements.
- **Flexibility** to adjust to meet patient needs. For example, adjusted scheduling process to allow patients who came to ED in the evening to be offered a next-day appointment with the RN prescriber in the primary health care clinic.

## Lessons learned

- Early community engagement and constructive facilitation of community engagement sessions helped ensure successful implementation.
- Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. A process map for team members clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and scope of practice for the RN prescriber.

## How can I learn more?

Contact the organization.

**Brenna MacInnis, Team Lead/Evaluation and Measurement Lead,**  
Optimizing Primary Health Care Access in Neil's Harbour  
brenna.macinnis@nshealth.ca

**Heather Gillis, Team Lead/Evaluation and Measurement Lead,**  
Optimizing Primary Health Care Access in Neil's Harbour  
Heather.gillis@nshealth.ca

**Jennifer Kendrick, Team Lead/Evaluation and Measurement Lead,**  
Optimizing Primary Health Care Access in Neil's Harbour.  
Jennifer.Kendrick@nshealth.ca



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## Why was this summary created?

Nova Scotia Health, 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 Nova Scotia Health to help others learn about their work and generate discussion about how similar approaches could be adapted and applied elsewhere.

