

Key Messages

- 1. Our goal is to enhance access to care for people living in rural* Canada.** We propose pan-Canadian directions for provinces and territories, educators, administrative leaders, policy-makers, health care professionals, all levels of government, and communities to use to enable equitable access to health care. Stakeholders working collaboratively and doing their part to implement these directions will improve equitable access to health care in rural Canada.
- 2. We need to build and improve upon the Canadian medical education system’s early successes in training physicians who are ready, able, and willing to work in rural Canada.** Medical education provided in rural settings is critical to successful physician recruitment and long-term retention strategies. Although education plays an important role in recruitment and retention, focusing on it alone will not fix the health care challenges faced in rural Canada—more can be done.
- 3. We can strengthen relationships between rural family physicians, other specialists, and other health care providers through the creation of networks of care that improve access and positively influence physician retention.** Good practices already exist across Canada; these practices need to be leveraged and shared.
- 4. By supporting rural-specific research, we can create evidence-informed solutions and policies to enhance the health of rural Canadians.** All jurisdictions and stakeholders can benefit from using an evidence-informed planning framework to support the implementation of rural medical education and delivery on health care in well-networked and supported rural practices. Comprehensive and accurate information is needed to shape a strong rural medical workforce that uses robust indicators and outcomes. The aim is to promote support for research that is designed and conducted by those working and living in rural Canada.

*“Rural” is defined as those communities that are geographically located in rural and remote regions of Canada and are distinctly or partly populated by Indigenous people.

5. **Establishing a comprehensive rural health care strategy that builds on successes within the health care and education systems across Canada is essential.** We need a national strategy that includes participation from the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to further develop rural physician workforce policies and interventions that will facilitate the delivery of high-quality patient-centred care and equitable access for those who live in rural Canada. The four directions described in the Rural Road Map are intended to guide conversations, foster collaborations, and catalyze innovations to improve how health care is provided to people in Canada no matter where they live.
6. **We can address Indigenous health needs effectively by generating a multi-stakeholder rural health care strategy that includes the participation of Indigenous people to benefit these communities in rural Canada.** Increasing the number of Indigenous health care professionals trained in Canada, improving the retention of health care professionals within rural Indigenous communities, and providing cultural safety training for all health care professionals are ways to achieve success. The actions in the Rural Road Map align with the commitment to renew relationships with Indigenous peoples through respect, cooperation, and partnership.
7. **Better mechanisms are needed to strengthen the delivery of mental health services in rural Canada through local networks of care.** Key challenges relate to the lack of provision of or access to mental health care services. Developing patient-centred models that use networks of care and distance technology to bridge the geographic barriers between rural physicians and other health care providers is necessary. We can enhance mental health care provided to individuals living in rural Canada.
8. **The Rural Road Map can foster a renewed commitment from the provinces, territories, and all other stakeholders to advance a pan-Canadian collaborative on health innovation.** We have an opportunity to improve access to care and health outcomes through increased capacity and sustainability of a rural physician workforce with individuals who are willing to work and live in rural communities in the long term. The Rural Road Map outlines what is needed. It points the way to more effective, efficient, and culturally safe practices offered by family physicians, their teams, and the communities within which they work.