

# ADVOCACY

## TOPIC: DIRECT ACCESS AND SUN LIFE FEDERAL EMPLOYEE BENEFIT PLANS

While many extended health benefits (EHB) plans allow direct access to physiotherapy services without a doctor's referral, there are a number of plans that still require it. In 2018, the NSPA identified this as an area that was important to members and worth advocating for the elimination of this requirement. The NSPA advocacy committee identified that:

- Physiotherapy is a regulated health profession that was granted direct access in Nova Scotia in 1999.
- A visit to a physician to obtain a referral is an unnecessary obstacle – patients often don't proceed with care because they don't have a physician or there is an excessive delay in obtaining a referral.
- A physician visit unnecessarily burdens an already overstressed provincial health care system where many people don't have a family doctor.
- A physician visit downloads the cost of access to private service to the public system.

Since 2018, the NSPA has worked to engage with stakeholders on this issue. This has included a meeting with two MLAs and correspondence with the President of the Secretariat of the Treasury Board as well as Doctor's Nova Scotia. Since that time, the NSPA has received a letter of endorsement from Doctor's Nova Scotia stating that physicians feel this requirement is unnecessary, and we have begun to work collaboratively with staff from CPA National to engage with large stakeholders, such as SunLife, the underwriter of the federal employees plan (one that requires a referral).

It has been unfortunate that the COVID-19 pandemic has been the catalyst, but in March of 2020 the Treasury Board instructed SunLife to remove the requirement for a doctor's referral to access physiotherapy through their EHB. Our goal is to support CPA National in making this a permanent change.

Written by David Kachan, Advocacy Committee Member