



## **PHYSIOTHERAPISTS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN RESOLVING BURDEN ON HEALTHCARE SYSTEM**

The Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association shares in the Government's desire to improve our province's healthcare system. Innovative solutions are needed to solve the problems currently faced.

Physiotherapists can be better optimized to help support and alleviate the burden on the healthcare system. We call on the Minister of Health and health system leads to Expand adoption of positions/roles for physiotherapists in Emergency Departments (EDs) across the province.

### **Our health system is in crisis and increasing demand impacts access to services in Emergency Departments across Nova Scotia**

EDs in Nova Scotia are seeing an increase in volume of patients, some to record numbers.<sup>1,2</sup> The chief of the province's second busiest ED says that capacity is now at "a highly concerning level."<sup>1</sup> Between April 1, 2021 and March 31, 2022 there were 536,666 visits to EDs in the province.<sup>3</sup> Eight percent of those people left before they received medical attention.<sup>3</sup>

### **Physiotherapists, working to their full scope and competencies, in EDs and other areas, increase capacity in the health care system and speed access to needed care**

Physiotherapists have been working in EDs in Nova Scotia since 2009, but as a consult or on-call basis and primarily for mobility assessments. As direct access care providers, physiotherapists are effective in the diagnosis and management of patients with musculoskeletal (MSK) injuries (i.e. fractures, sprains, strains)<sup>4</sup> and more. Physiotherapists across the country and internationally (including the United Kingdom and Australia) are working as **first point of contact in EDs for MSK injuries**. In this role, physiotherapists have the capacity to:<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>

- Reduce patient wait times,
- Reduce length of stay,
- Reduce medication intake (including opioids),
- Decrease levels of pain and disability,
- Decrease frequency of follow up, and
- Increase patient satisfaction.

Physiotherapists managing MSK injuries have equivalent clinical outcomes and lower direct costs than doctors or emergency nurse practitioners.<sup>6,8</sup> As well, by seeing MSK injuries, this frees up doctors to manage more complex conditions and improves patient flow.<sup>6</sup> Trials in Quebec have demonstrated the effectiveness of this model<sup>5</sup> and have resulted in the implementation of 31 Physiotherapists servicing 5 EDs in the Province and counting.<sup>9</sup>

**In Nova Scotia, there are no legislative changes needed to incorporate physiotherapists as first point of contact in EDs, as assessing and triaging MSK injuries is within our current scope of practice.**



## References

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- 3) Department of Health and Wellness. (2022, December). *Annual Accountability Report on Emergency Departments April 1, 2021 – March 31*. <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/publications/emergency-departments-report-2021-2022.pdf>
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- 9) D'Entremont, Y. (2023, January 26). *Physiotherapists advocating to have role in emergency departments in Nova Scotia*. Halifax Examiner. <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/health/physiotherapists-advocating-to-have-role-in-emergency-departments-in-nova-scotia/>