
POSITION PAPER ON THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Submitted by: Kent Regional Service
Commission

Commission de services
régionaux de Kent



Kent Regional
Service Commission

SUBMITTED TO THE
HONOURABLE DOROTHY
SHEPPARD, MINISTER OF
HEALTH FOR NEW
BRUNSWICK

SUMMARY

This report from the Kent Regional Service Commission is a follow-up to the first report published in the fall of 2020, which focused on the health services offered in Kent County and the opinions of health professionals. After having consulted health professionals, we wanted to consult the general population in order to get their opinion on the health system. This initiative came at the same time as the Department of Health announced that it would be launching public consultations on health throughout the province. We decided that our initiative to consult the public would contribute to our position on health reform. In this document, you will find the opinions, concerns and worries that were shared with us by the population of Kent County during numerous virtual meetings. We formed 6 committees that were divided into sub-regions of Kent County. We then categorized their comments according to the five objectives of the *Canadian Framework on Quality and Patient Safety in Health Services*. Following this section, we are making five recommendations to the Department of Health based on the needs of our citizens. The lack of personnel in health care institutions, the decentralization of health care services, the lack of easily accessible services, the lack of services for vulnerable people, and the lack of focus on patients and communities were the themes that were most often discussed at these meetings. We therefore felt it was appropriate to make formal recommendations to the government.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the citizens of Kent County who took part in the consultations for their valuable collaboration. Without their involvement, this report would never have been written.

INTRODUCTION

This document is a follow-up to the fall 2020 report *Health Services in Kent County*. Following the announcement of the closure of emergency rooms at night in 6 rural hospitals in the province in February 2020, Kent County mobilized themselves to ensure that services at the Stella-Maris-de-Kent Hospital (SMKH) would not be reduced. These consultations with citizens were a continuation of a larger project undertaken by the Kent Regional Service Commission (KRSC) over a year ago. Since the SMKH is located in a local service district (LSD), the KRSC took the lead in advocating for the retention of emergency services at the hospital, but also for all citizens who use it. Even though the government has retracted its decision, the KRSC has decided to continue its efforts and to look into the situation of health services in Kent County. Since health services go far beyond hospital services, the KRSC has given itself the mandate to closely evaluate the health status of its citizens and the services offered to them. In May 2020, an intern was hired to research the services currently offered, consult with health professionals in the region and offer recommendations. However, due to time constraints, we did not have the opportunity to consult the general population. Nevertheless, consulting the general population was a crucial step in our approach. That is why, even after the intern's departure, the KRSC continued to advance the project with the collaboration of valuable partners. We asked our local elected officials to send us names of people in their respective communities who would be interested in giving their opinions on health. We then met, by sub-region, with these individuals to explain the process undertaken since February 2020 and we communicated what was expected of their input in this study. We were

able to create six citizens' committees from across Kent County. Our committees were the following: Bouctouche, Kent North, Kent South, Rexton, Richibucto and Rogersville. The setting up of the committees and the announcement of the provincial public consultations happened almost at the same time. We were therefore able to encourage and prepare our members to participate in the provincial consultations. More than 20 meetings were held in the space of 5 weeks with our local committees.

In this document, you will find the thoughts, recommendations, concerns and worries of the citizens of Kent County regarding the New Brunswick health system. We believe that this document reflects what has been shared with us over the past few months. The citizens' concerns are justified and their requests are reasonable. This document also serves as a voice for citizens who are asking to be listened to and taken seriously.

FINDINGS

In order to summarize what was shared with us by the population of Kent County, the comments will be divided according to the five objectives of the *Canadian Quality and Patient Safety Framework for Health Services*. This framework was founded by the Canadian Patient Safety Institute (CPSI) and the Health Standards Organization (HSO). CPSI and HSO formed this partnership to create a framework that promotes safe, high-quality healthcare for all people in Canada. Since patient safety incidents are the 3rd leading cause of death in Canada, both organizations felt it was important to create this framework. In addition, there is evidence that health care varies by age, gender, ethnicity, geography and socio-economic status. On the other hand, the framework can be used by anyone, regardless of their role in the health care system. Guides have been created for each category of stakeholder: the public, board members, health sector leaders, health teams and policy-makers. This framework is evidence-based and the KRSC strongly believes that such a tool should be used in New Brunswick health services. The comments shared with us by citizens will be categorized according to the following five objectives: person-centred care, safe care, accessible care, appropriate care and integrated care. Then, we will make some recommendations based on what was shared with us by the public.

PERSON-CENTRED CARE

"People who use health services must be equal partners in the planning, development and monitoring of care to ensure that care meets their needs and that these people achieve the best possible outcomes. "

- The citizens of Kent County affirm that the patient should have the primary role in the health care system. The patient must be at the center of all decisions made by the health care system.
- Kent County patients want their place at the table in both health care systems.
- Expert advice must be considered while giving patients a voice.
- Health care professionals are the primary advocates for patients. They need to help make their voices heard. Since patients don't always know what their needs are, health care professionals must represent them.

SAFE HEALTH CARE

"Health services are safe and do not cause preventable harm."

- There should be easily accessible resources that indicate how citizens can file a complaint. For example, a phone line and an electronic complaint system.
- Understaffing in all areas of the health system means that care is sometimes unsafe. Lack of staff means that health care professionals do not have time to monitor patients adequately.
- The lack of adequate physical space for patients does not support safe care.

ACCESSIBLE CARE

"People have timely and equitable access to quality health services."

- For Kent County citizens, having accessible services means having services in their language of choice, not too far from home and of good quality.

- Citizens think that there should be more ambulatory services such as hemodialysis and chemotherapy in Kent County to improve accessibility.
- Travel to appointments is a major concern for Kent County citizens. If a citizen does not have a car, it becomes very difficult to access health care.
- People find it difficult to access health care on evenings and weekends. Often their last option is the emergency room.
- The pandemic has shown us that virtual care is realistic. Citizens have appreciated the telemedicine services received by their health care professionals. Virtual care is one of the solutions to consider improving accessibility, especially in our rural context.
- Accessibility to French language services is of high importance to our citizens. We need to protect our French language services.
- Mental health services are not accessible enough for those who need them. There are insufficient services and those that do exist are difficult to access in a timely manner.
- Tertiary and secondary services should be distributed throughout the province, not just in urban centers.
- The citizens of Kent County deplore the excessive waiting time at the SMKJ.
- The Extra-Mural Program and New Brunswick Ambulance services are essential to improve accessibility. All measures must be taken to reduce delays to a strict minimum. Similarly, ambulance attendants must receive all the additional training necessary to increase their efficiency in the management of patients.

APPROPRIATE CARE

"Care is evidence-based and person-centred."

- In order to improve the management of health services, private sector practices and philosophy could be implemented: for them, quality of service and client satisfaction are essential to the success (clinical and financial) of the business.
- Kent County citizens believe that they should have easy access to their medical records and that there should be better computerization of medical records in health care facilities.

- In general, appropriate care is defined as the right service, to the right patient, in the right place, at the right time.

INTEGRATED CARE

"Health services are seamless and well coordinated, promoting smooth transitions."

- A major concern for our citizens is the wait time for a nursing home placement. In fact, many hospital beds are occupied by seniors who are waiting for their nursing home beds. The hospital is not an appropriate care setting for these people. Citizens are asking for a better continuity of care, from the hospital to the home.
- There needs to be better and more timely information sharing between the two health authorities. Health records should be electronic and easily accessible by patients at all times.
- Computer systems should be interoperable so that information can be shared quickly. For example, between health authorities, medical clinics, private practices and other health care providers.
- Better coordination is needed between departments (e.g., health, social development, justice).
- A high proportion of people in Kent County use the emergency room as their regular point of service for health care. We believe that this is partly due to the lack of services outside normal office hours such as evenings and weekends. In order for people to stop using the ER for non-urgent situations, other options must be available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of what has been shared with us by the citizens of Kent County, the Kent Regional Service Commission makes the following recommendations to the Department of Health.

1. A long-term recruitment plan and contingency plan to support health system staff

Workforce shortages are felt everywhere. However, the lack of human resources in the health care system jeopardizes patient safety and the quality of care they receive. The citizens of Kent County are very concerned about the lack of staff in hospitals and nursing homes. The Department needs to put in place a long-term recruitment plans to ensure that the situation does not worsen in the years to come. Nevertheless, the situation is already critical and staff are exhausted. The pandemic has certainly not helped the situation. We have been made aware by citizens that the situation at the SMKH is deplorable. Staff are overworked and employees are leaving for less overwhelming work environments. The Department and the health authorities must address this problem before unfortunate incidents occur. We cannot improve the health of the population at the expense of health care professionals. They deserve a better quality of work life.

In the long term, we believe that the Department, health authorities, professional associations, immigration agencies and communities must work together to put in place a better system of recognition and equivalence of diplomas for newcomers. On the other hand, the quota of certain health programs does not contribute to the training and recruitment of health professionals. If we are so short of staff, why not train more? We also need to give communities a greater role in recruiting personnel. Communities can play a big role in recruiting and welcoming new staff. In the short term, we think that the department and the professional associations need to put aside the bureaucracy to welcome more staff.

2. Decentralization to Communities and Local Governance of Health Institutions

Communities know what they need to thrive and be healthy. However, they have little or no say in the decisions made about their health care system. For example, the public is very disappointed that SMKH no longer has a facility director. They feel lost when it comes to getting information about their hospital. There is no one there to represent them. Kent County is asking for the inclusion of the public for equal participation in the planning and management of health services. Communities should have the authority and responsibility for their health institutions. Many communities have told us that they know what they need and that they would like to be able to plan their services according to their population. Ultimately, the public is both the client and the owner of the health care system and should make the decisions.

3. Services focused on vulnerable populations such as seniors and people living with mental health issues

In all the meetings with our local committees, the subject of seniors has been the focus of discussion on several occasions. The citizens of Kent County are very concerned about the services that are offered to our seniors. New Brunswick has a rapidly aging population and everyone wants better care for this vulnerable population. Indeed, the public has shared with us that they are concerned about the wait at the hospital before getting a place in a care facility, the lack of space in nursing homes, the lack of staffing in nursing homes, the lack of home care services for seniors and much more. Our seniors deserve much better.

Mental health has also been a topic at all the local committee meetings. We are pleased that the Department has put in place the *Interdepartmental Plan for Addictions and Mental Health 2021-2025*. However, we hope that this plan will be rigorously followed and that it will produce the desired results. The citizens of Kent County are very concerned about the lack of mental health services and the very long wait times, especially in rural areas. In addition, the public feels that there is a lot of education and prevention to be done in the area of mental health.

4. Better Access to Health Services for the Population of Kent County

In order to improve accessibility to health services for the entire population of Kent County, we believe that there must be new services available. For example, the addition of ambulatory clinics at the SMKH and in the region is necessary. On the other hand, citizens have shared with us on several occasions that they would like to have access to after-hours, walk-in clinics. These clinics are for the benefit of people who do not have a family doctor or who cannot get an appointment in a reasonable amount of time. In addition, such clinics would help to reduce overcrowding in the SMKH emergency department.

In addition, transportation services for Kent County citizens could also facilitate accessibility to services when they have no choice but to travel. The Extra-Mural Program and New Brunswick Ambulance services are essential to our population. They allow a vulnerable population to receive care at home.

5. Equal participation of communities and patients in the planning, development and monitoring of health services

We would like to see a greater emphasis on communities and patients. Communities, elected municipal officials and citizens must be at the center of decisions about the health care system. As per Canadian standards, patients/citizens must participate and vote on various committees related to governance and clinical organization. There is a need for committees and boards where issues are discussed openly and transparently with the public. In addition, health care professionals should have an important place at the decision-making table. We need to listen to them and let them speak without reprisal. Finally, access to information for patients and the general public must be facilitated.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the KRSC has done an important job in consulting its population regarding health services. Citizens have been very helpful in sharing their opinions and concerns about the health care system in the meetings we have held with them. Ultimately, they are in the best position to guide us as they are the reason for the health system. They are both the owners and the customers of this great enterprise that is the

health system. We now hope that these recommendations will be taken seriously and implemented by the Department of Health. The KRSC is more than ready to be part of the discussion by engaging, collaborating and acting as a partner to represent the best interests of the people of Kent County.