

## Memorandum / Note de service

**To:** Fee for Service (FFS) Physicians

**From:** Dr. André Celliers  
Executive Director Medical Affairs

**Date :** June 13, 2020

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**Subject :** Base Financial Support Feedback

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Thank you for your feedback regarding the memo on June 11, which notified fee-for-service physicians about changes to the stipend provided by Health PEI during a reduction in services due to COVID-19.

We recognize these are stressful and difficult times for everyone, and that the recent changes have eroded some of the goodwill that has been built during this pandemic and before. We acknowledge that the timing of the notice, and the fact it affects you retroactively, is disconcerting. We are sorry for that. While we worked hard to get the initial package approved to support you early in the pandemic, we did not pay close enough attention to the process on when the package is scaled back down. This resulted in a delayed decision and communication of that decision.

The work of physicians during this pandemic has been very important. From staffing the cough and fever clinics, to providing essential services and care in new ways, to having a leading voice in the pandemic response in our hospitals, you have worked to care for patients in the best ways possible within the context of a pandemic. You have shown determination, flexibility, and caring in this response. We thank you for that.

Realizing this important role doctors play in health care, starting March 16, Health PEI provided a daily stipend to fee-for-service physicians who may have had a reduction in their ability to provide care due to the move to essential services. PEI was one of the first jurisdictions in Canada to offer this kind of support.

This stipend was designed to bridge the gap between regular operations pre-COVID, and our return to a new normal as province. The support did have an end timeframe, where Health PEI and government would re-evaluate the stipend.

On June 1, with the early move to Phase 3 of Renew PEI, the trigger to re-evaluate the stipend was met, requiring the changes noted in the previous memo. Many options were discussed between Health PEI and government, and the changes noted in the previous memo were felt to provide a way to ensure funding remains in place, while reflecting the new work being done in Phase 3 by physicians in their practices.

Some of the concern we have received is from physicians who feel they are lacking direction on how to reopen and whether non-essential services can restart now. This has been particularly noted by family practitioners. To clarify, family practices have not been closed by Health PEI are they are free to provide usual services, although the pandemic and infection control requirements have certainly changed how they can offer these services.

Guidance was shared on March 16 from Health PEI, detailing how to safely operate outpatient clinics during COVID-19. Additional guidance was provided on March 25 and [May 21](#) from the Chief Public Health Office to help physicians stay up-to-date on how to provide care in their offices during this time. Virtual Care codes were provided to help implement the ability to provide safe, physically distanced care over telephone, email and video platforms.

We do recognize that Health PEI's activation of essential services, as well as the reduced willingness on behalf of patients to seek care and additional PPE requirements, limited the ability of physicians to provide some services. This was the impetus for the creation of the stipend program – to give support when it is most needed.

Now, in Phase 3, physicians are able to provide many of their normal services, whether through telephone, virtual care, or in person. Following the CPHO guidance on safe work procedures for physician offices, you should now have the ability to bill close to the amount that would have been provided by the stipend. Health PEI will continue to reinforce to the public that care is available and safe, and that attending medical appointments is a necessary part of their wellbeing, as we partner in ensuring Islanders get the care they need. Those fee-for-service physicians who need assistance in obtaining necessary PPE should contact Donna Lamont ([donna@mspei.org](mailto:donna@mspei.org)) who is the contact for the private physician office for provincial PPE supplies.

Government and Health PEI will continue to monitor the situation. If the COVID-19 response changes again in a way that limits the ability of fee-for-service physicians to work, we will certainly re-evaluate what support may be available.

Thank you for your feedback, co-operation and continued dedication in caring for Islanders.