

Finding a Family Doctor

Value of a family doctor

Having a family doctor, or primary care nurse practitioner, is important to help with everyday health care. They can help keep people healthy, help manage chronic illnesses and help people get connected with specialists if they need them.

Not all family doctors or nurse practitioners are the same. Some doctors work independently, while others are part of larger teams including other providers like nurses, dietitians, pharmacists and social workers. For some people with disabilities who have a lot of health issues, it can be helpful to see a doctor who is part of a team such as a Community Health Centre or a Family Health Team.

When choosing a family doctor, there are a number of different things to consider. What is most important for one person might be different for another person.

When trying to find a family doctor, it can be helpful to:

- Review the questions listed below with your family member and discuss what is important to them.
- Learn more about the different models of care that family doctors belong to (see next page) and why this might make a difference. Ask doctors about the model of care they belong to and consider which one makes the most sense for your family member.

Here are some questions to ask when trying to find a family doctor:

- How comfortable/familiar is the doctor with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD)?
- Can appointment times accommodate a person's schedule? (e.g., evening hours if they work during day)
- How quickly can you get an appointment?
- How important is distance from home?
- How important is accessibility to public transportation?
- How important are hours of operation? Are evening or weekend visits needed?
- Does it matter if the doctor is male or female?
- Is it important to be part of a larger kind of team with different types of health care providers?

The logo for Health Care Connect features the words "Health Care" in a blue serif font above the word "Connect" in a green sans-serif font.

Looking for a family doctor?

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To speak with someone about finding a family doctor in Ontario, contact Health Care Connect:
1-800-445-1822

Different types of family doctors

Not all family doctors or nurse practitioners are the same. Some have extra services available that can be important for people with disabilities. One thing to think about when choosing a new doctor is their delivery model. There are three main types of primary care models:

Solo practitioners – Some doctors may work in a practice by themselves or share a practice with other primary care providers. Doctors in these practices do not tend to have extended hours (e.g., evenings and weekends). Typically, there are no other health care providers from other disciplines at these practices.

Groups of doctors – Some doctors work in groups with other doctors. In Ontario, these would include Family Health Organizations and Family Health Networks. If your doctor is not available, another doctor from the team can take the appointment. The doctors may have after hour clinics that you can go to when the doctor's office is closed. There may be a nurse or other kind of allied health professional but it is not a big part of how care is provided. The different doctors who work there do most of the work. It can be helpful that these groups have after hour clinics and they can share information with each other, but if you need to see other types of health care providers, you would have to go somewhere else for that care.

Primary care teams – Some doctors or nurse practitioners work as part of a larger team including other types of health care providers like nurses, social workers, dietitians, psychologists, occupational therapists, pharmacists and health educators. These include Family Health Teams and Community Health Centres. Each team is a little bit different so not all types of health care providers are on each team. What is the same about each primary care team is that the services offered by the team are free to the patient, and are under one roof. So you can see your doctor and also see the other people on the team if that is what the team thinks would be best. Community Health Centres are especially focused on helping patients with complex health care needs. *These practices can be really helpful for patients with disabilities who have multiple health conditions or need some extra support from their doctors.*

