

Resources to keep your health on track when you don't have a family doctor

While not having a family doctor is unsettling, there are steps you can take to prepare for it and ensure that your health care stays on track.

Here's a checklist of things to keep in mind:

1 Book a final appointment

If you can, book a final appointment with your doctor. Renew your medications for as long as your doctor recommends. Ask who will handle future blood work results and how you'll be notified if you need urgent care. If you have a referral to a specialist underway, that specialist should contact you directly to set up your appointment. If your doctor has requested you get blood work, X-rays or another diagnostic test, get it done right away, as receiving the results and any medication changes may become complicated once your doctor is gone.

2 Put your name on the waitlist

Register on the [Need a Family Doctor waitlist](#) online or by calling 811. Once you are on the waitlist, you can register to receive virtual care through [VirtualCareNS](#), which provides virtual care to Nova Scotians who don't have a family doctor. Nova Scotia Health [publishes a monthly report on the waitlist](#), including regional statistics.

3 See if you need a copy of your medical record

Contact your doctor's office if you'd like a copy of your medical record – it's not required but can be helpful for your next family doctor if you have complex health issues. Doctors are required to keep patient medical records for 10 years (for children, it's 10 years beyond the time the child reaches age 19), even once their practice closes. When that period of time passes, the files are destroyed. If you can't contact your doctor's office, [contact the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia](#) to find out where your record is stored.

4 Self-refer for cancer screening

Don't let cancer screening fall off your radar. Sexually active people over age 25 with a cervix should have [Pap tests every three years](#). You can book one at a local [Well Woman Clinic](#). People aged 50 to 74 should screen for colon cancer every two years; [the Colon Cancer Prevention Program](#) mails out test kits. You can also [book a mammogram](#) to check for breast cancer; it's recommended every two to three years for women aged 50 to 74 and for people in that age group who have been [taking gender-affirming hormones](#) like estrogen for more than five years. [Mobile clinics are also available](#) across the province.

5 Find health care in the community

You can also self-refer for other health care, including [mental health services](#), [addictions treatment programs](#) and [programs to quit smoking](#). Stay up to date with [your immunizations](#), including [the flu shot and COVID-19 vaccines](#). There are also programs available for Nova Scotians who need [continuing care at home](#) in their community. This includes nursing care, home care, respite care, palliative care, home oxygen services and more.

6 Don't delay getting medical help

There are walk-in and after-hours clinics available across Nova Scotia – [see this list for details](#). [VirtualCareNS](#), which provides virtual care to Nova Scotians who don't have a family doctor, is also available (you must be on the [waitlist for a family doctor](#) to qualify). In addition, there is now [a primary care mobile health clinic](#) that visits communities across Nova Scotia, providing appointments for folks without a family doctor.

Remember: If you are experiencing a health crisis, or don't have any other options for non-urgent medical care, don't hesitate to visit your closest emergency department (ED). Be patient – EDs across Nova Scotia are under incredible strain, with all health-care staff doing the best they can. If you visit the ED for a non-urgent issue, be prepared to wait. Bring snacks and drinks (and toys for your kids), any medications you may need, a charging cord or power bank for your phone, and something to read.