

# We are Family Physicians: The Keystone of Ontario's Health System



**Not providers. Not interchangeable. Central to care.**

**Family physicians are not generic “providers.” We are comprehensive clinicians, relationship builders, and system integrators. Our role is distinct, foundational, and essential to the health of Ontarians.**

## Please, Stop Calling us “Providers”

Words matter. When family physicians are called “providers,” it flattens our identity and erases the depth of our training, scope, and responsibility. It suggests we are generic or interchangeable, when we are neither.

If a collective term is needed, use one that reflects our professional identities, like “clinicians” or “health care professionals.” Better yet, refer to us by our true name: family physician.

Language isn’t neutral, it shapes how one is seen, valued, and included.

## Health Professionals are not Interchangeable

In a complex system, many professionals contribute to care. While scopes may overlap, roles are not interchangeable. Treating them as equivalent risks blurring lines of accountability, especially in complex or high-stakes care. Family physicians are trained to lead care, hold clinical responsibility across settings, and make diagnostic and management decisions that others are not equipped to carry.

Pharmacists, nurse practitioners, and other clinicians offer valuable expertise. They are essential collaborators in team-based care. But their education is not equivalent to that of a family physician. Family physicians complete a minimum of ten years of post-secondary education, including specialized residency training in comprehensive, longitudinal care. We are trained to diagnose, manage complexity, and lead care across settings and life stages.

We deeply value our colleagues. But you can’t swap us out. Family physicians are the keystone of primary care, and the system doesn’t function without us.

## Recognize us. Name us. Include us.

Family physicians are not just participants in the system, we are its keystone. Alongside our teams, we provide first contact for the majority of care in Ontario. We manage complexity, hold relationships, and carry the weight of the system’s day-to-day demands.

We must be at the table, not as a token voice, but as leaders shaping how care is delivered, resourced, and sustained.