

Eliminating Sick Notes Recommendation for Action



In fall 2024, the Joint Task Force to Reduce Administrative Burdens for Physicians [recommended](#) the elimination of sick notes to the Minister of Health. Over the last two years, Doctors Manitoba has extensively researched the impact of sick notes and consulted broadly with public and private employers, unions, and other groups to build a consensus on how to transition away from sick notes.

Most recently, this consultation included a workshop and follow up meetings with leaders representing employers, labour, and government, as well as experts in human resources, occupational medicine, and law. All of this contributed to a growing consensus about the need to limit sick notes, as outlined in this position statement and recommended approach.

Through these engagements, we heard clearly that:

- Employers strongly support efforts to improve overall health system capacity.
- Sick notes, to solely verify absences, should be eliminated because they offer little to no value and waste health system resources.
- Employers and workers prefer a consistent approach and level playing field.
- Physicians and other regulated health providers perform an essential role in providing expert advice in areas such as accommodations and safe return-to-work, but the current unstandardized approach often does not work well for workers, employers or doctors.

Recommendation for Government

Manitoba's physicians are requesting the province of Manitoba eliminate sick notes through legislation, with clear definitions and a consistent approach. The goal is to eliminate sick notes in workplaces, childcare facilities, schools and post-secondary institutions, while ensuring physician advice is available to these institutions when it will help inform decisions about workers or students. We estimate these actions would free up about 300,000 physician visits per year, the equivalent of adding over 50 doctors at no cost.

Clear Definitions

Ensuring legislation has clear definitions is important, particularly to employers, to ensure any limits on sick notes don't impede access to medical advice and information that informs decisions in the workplace or educational institution. The following definitions are proposed:

Sick Note - A document to verify an illness or injury resulting in a short-term absence from work, school or other institution. Sick notes serve the sole purpose of illness verification.

Doctors Notes, Medical Certificates and Reports - There are other types of requests to physicians and other providers for advice beyond simple illness verification, often to inform decisions in the workplace or educational institution about:

- Accommodations
- Long term leave and a safe return to work
- Functioning

There are thousands of employers and educational institutions in Manitoba and each has its own unique requirements or medical forms for these types of requests. Often, other regulated health care providers are overlooked or excluded when they have the training and expertise needed to help, such as for functional limitations.

Eliminating Sick Notes



Legislation

1. **Eliminate the use of sick notes**, used solely to verify as defined above, for short-term absences of 10 days or less from work or school. This builds on approaches in several provinces, and mirrors policies recently introduced in the Interlake-Eastern and Winnipeg Regional Health Authorities.
2. **Promote alternatives to managing and verifying short-term absences from work or school for illness**. Similar to Ontario, employers may request reasonable evidence or documentation, such as a legally valid self-attestation form, as well as receipts or similar documentation from appointments or health care interactions. Trust-based relationships and flexible leave policies may mitigate the need for verification.
3. **Add clarity about when a medical certificate or report can be requested**. Medical certificates or reports could be requested for:
 - Situations where medical information and advice adds value, such as supporting employee accommodations; safe return to work; or management of recurring absences related to an ongoing physical or mental health issue.
 - Leaves longer than two weeks or 10 consecutive working days, similar to Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Interlake Regional Health Authority and other large employers to facilitate a safe return to work.
 - Specific protected leaves of absence such as maternity leave, organ donation leave, or compassionate care leave.
4. **Develop and implement standardized forms for the most common requests to physicians from employers**, including accommodations, functional assessments and safe return-to-work. The goal would be a consistent approach, integrated into electronic medical record systems, to ensure the right information is provided the first time for employers and workers, with less administrative burden on doctors. These forms must be developed collaboratively by an advisory group with members from Doctors Manitoba, employers, labour, and government.
5. **Compel employers and educational institutions to accept medical certificates and forms from other qualified regulated health professionals** in line with their respective scopes of practice, similar to other provinces such as Nova Scotia.

Doctors Manitoba will help by:

1. **Developing a comprehensive toolkit for employers**, created with experts from HR and other fields, with resources and best practices for managing short term absences to support transition from sick note use.
2. **Supporting the creation of standardized forms** to build a consistent approach for common requests to doctors, in collaboration with the provincial government, employers, unions, insurance firms, and other experts.
3. **Developing training for doctors on common workplace and insurance forms and requests**, such as accommodations and return-to-work to help ensure workers and employers get the information they need the first time.

Background

Why Eliminate Sick Notes?

There are many strong reasons Manitoba should take action to eliminate sick notes:

- **Good for patients:** Eliminating sick notes will reduce unnecessary visits to the doctor or emergency room, freeing up over 300,000 patient visits per year for patients requiring actual medical care. This is equivalent to immediately adding more than 50 doctors to Manitoba's health system at no additional cost.
- **Good for employers:** Sick notes aren't effective for verifying illness-related absences, as many patients no longer have symptoms to verify when they see a physician. It also risks eroding productivity, with many workers saying they would go to work sick, and possibly infectious, rather than get a sick note. Promoting alternatives will be good for business and good for workers.
- **Good for doctors:** Manitoba has the fewest family physicians per capita in Canada, and more than half are experiencing high levels of burnout. Reducing administrative burdens, including sick notes, is one way to help keep them practicing in Manitoba longer.
- **Good for taxpayers:** It costs taxpayers over \$8 million annually for the unnecessary visits just to get a sick note.
- **Manitoba is falling behind:** We are one of only two provinces (along with Alberta) that has not taken action to limit sick notes.

➔ Read more at SickNote.ca

Jurisdictional Scan

Many provinces have acted recently to limit sick notes, with progressively stronger legislation.

Sick Note Legislation	Jurisdiction
Eliminated for Short Term Leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• British Columbia (legislation pending Royal Assent; definition of short-term absence to be clarified in regulation)
Five Days Sick notes not permitted for 5 or less days of consecutive leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Canada (federally regulated sectors)• Nova Scotia (unless already had 2+ absences in a year)• Saskatchewan (unless already had 2+ absences in a year)
Less than Five Days Sick notes not permitted for limited days of absence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quebec (3 consecutive days or after 3+ periods of absence)• New Brunswick (4 consecutive days)• Prince Edward Island (3 consecutive days)• Ontario (3 cumulative days per year)
Sick Note Requirement Removed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Newfoundland & Labrador (recent legislation removed clause making sick notes mandatory after 3 days of leave)
Sick Notes not Regulated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alberta• Manitoba*

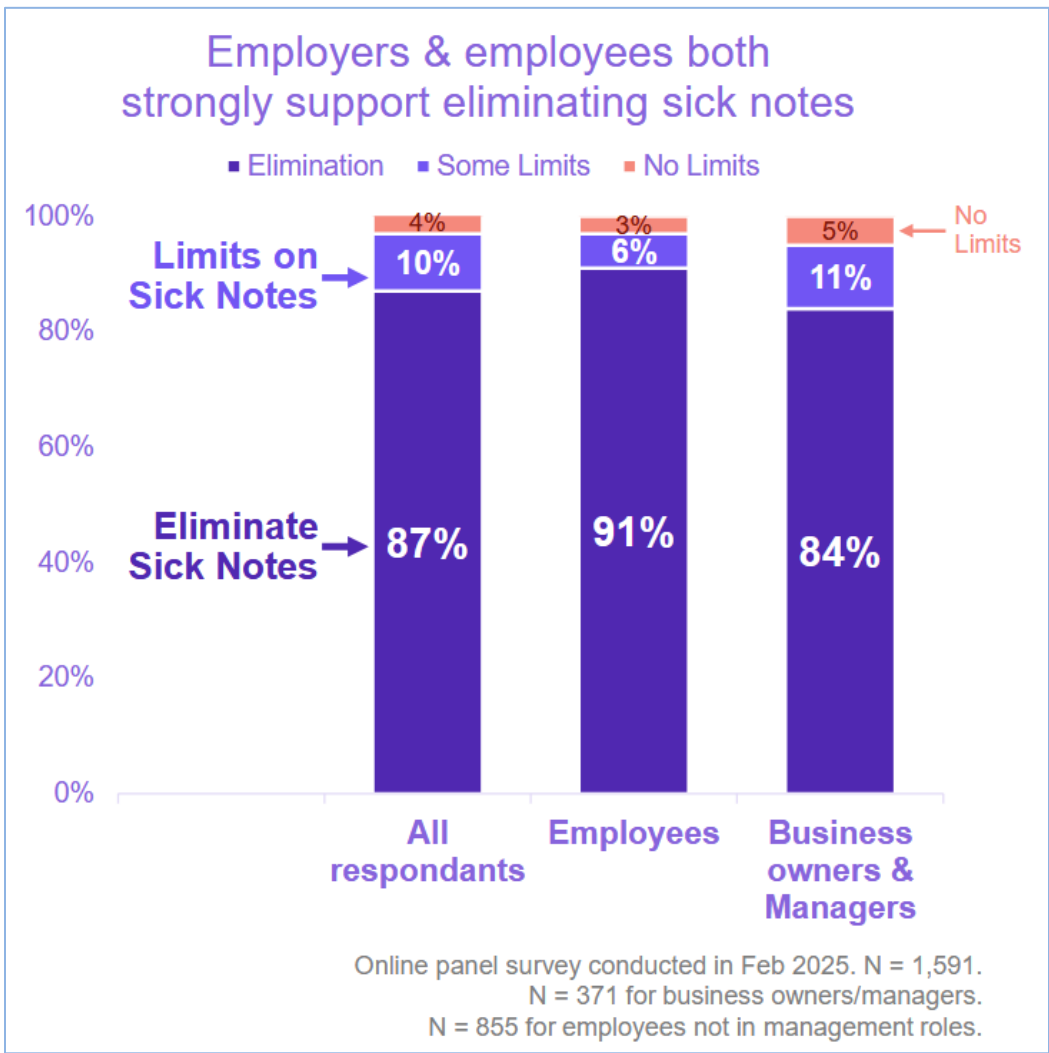
* In Manitoba, *The Employment Standards Code* allows employers to ask for any reasonable verification of the necessity of the leave. A 2016 private members' bill to limit sick note requests did not pass. The Code also requires medical certificates for protected leaves (e.g. maternity leave or compassionate care leave), though this provision was temporarily suspended during the pandemic and has not been re-enacted to date.

Support for Limiting Sick Notes

Strong Public Support for Limiting Sick Notes

In March 2025, Doctors Manitoba released new research based on a public survey showing strong public support for eliminating the requirement for sick notes to verify short-term work absences:

- 96% of Manitobans support eliminating or limiting sick notes, including 87% that favour elimination, and 10% who prefer limits on sick notes, such as after 10 or 7 days.
- 95% of business owners and managers support elimination or limits, including 84% for elimination and 11% for other limits.
- 71% of workers said they would go to work sick rather than get a sick note.



➔ [Learn more about public support and feedback here.](#)