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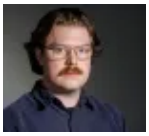

By: Matthew Frank
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Premier Wab Kinew said the province has hired 500 net new doctors in three years, a number he says surpasses his election campaign pledge and allows for the reopening of emergency departments in two hospitals.

Kinew released the numbers during a Wednesday press conference announcing the reopening of the Victoria Hospital ER next summer. He previously promised

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Close to 5,000 net new health-care workers added since 2023 election, province says



during his 2023 election campaign an NDP government would hire at least 400 net new doctors.

"Thanks to all the great staff who've worked on recruitment and retention. This is a major milestone for health care in Manitoba," he told reporters.



Ruth Bonneville / Free Press
Premier Wab Kinew at a press conference Wednesday announcing the reopening of the Victoria Hospital emergency room scheduled for next summer.

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The numbers jumped from a **reported 370 doctors added in August** to 500 because of seasonal licence renewals and more recruitment, Kinew said.

The new ER will have a step-down intensive care unit instead of an intensive care unit, Kinew said. Step-down intensive care units provide an intermediate level of hospital care between a standard general ward and a full intensive care unit.

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Kinew said there will be one-to-one ratios with patients and nurses and it will still have specialized equipment. He didn't provide further details.

Health Minister Uzoma Asagwara said the boost in physician headcount played a key role in the province's plans to reopen the Victoria and Eriksdale hospital emergency departments next year.

The Eriksdale hospital ER is set to open in the fall of 2027. Both ER openings were announced in Tuesday's throne speech.

"Our focus is going to be to keep our foot on the gas in terms of training and retaining healthcare workers. This site (Victoria Hospital) is going to be able to recruit more health-care workers because people are really excited about this work," the minister said during the press conference.

The Victoria ER was shut down in 2017 by the former Progressive Conservative government in a bid to concentrate emergency-room resources and reduce wait times at Health Sciences Centre, Grace General Hospital and St. Boniface Hospital.

Reopening the emergency department is "another piece of the puzzle" when addressing wait times, Asagwara said.

Since June, the province has added 60 health-care workers, including two new

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The emergency department will have 40 treatment spaces once open, according to a provincial news release.

The province said Tuesday it also plans to open ERs at Concordia and Seven Oaks hospitals in Winnipeg by 2031. ERs at both were shut down and converted into urgent care centres under the previous PC government in 2017.

While the province has strengthened recruitment numbers, there are still lingering shortages in specialized positions, a physicians' advocacy group said.

Emergency physicians are among the shortages, with staffing 25 per cent less than the national average, making it difficult for full physician coverage at existing Manitoba ERs, a Doctors Manitoba spokesperson said in an email statement.

"Doctors Manitoba will support the health system's recruitment and retention efforts over the fall, winter, and spring in advance of the government's plan to transition the Victoria Urgent Care to an ER by next summer, they said.



Darlene Jackson, president of the Manitoba Nurses Union, said nurses aren't confident that the province will

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Ruth Bonneville / Free Press
Health Minister Uzoma Asagwara

staffing levels for the new ERs.

She said ERs outside Winnipeg are struggling to maintain adequate staffing levels, and the province's recruitment efforts aren't yielding results within existing hospital emergency departments.

In the summer, nurses working in Selkirk Regional Health Centre and Steinbach's Bethesda Regional Health Centre emergency rooms wrote letters to the province raising concerns about high workloads and low staffing.

"You can open as many beds as you want, but if you can't staff them, it's just a bed," Jackson told the *Free Press*.

Progressive Conservative interim leader Konrad Narth said the province should focus on opening the new Portage Regional Health Centre in Portage la Prairie, rather than re-announcing ER openings. That facility is scheduled to open in the spring of 2027.

"Instead of talking about that, we hear again the re-announcement of two hospitals, which they talked about during their last campaign," Narth told reporters Wednesday.

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Reopening the emergency department was an NDP campaign promise in 2023.

In October 2025, Kinew said construction on the facility was slated for January 2026, targeting an opening in the first half of 2027.

This year's budget assigned $31.9 million for the construction of the new Victoria ER.

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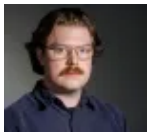

Matthew Frank

Reporter

Matthew Frank is a reporter for the Free Press city desk. He joined the newsroom in September 2026. Matthew has also worked as a reporter for *The Carillon* in southeastern Manitoba and as a Toronto-based national reporter for *The Globe and Mail*. **Read more about Matthew**.

Every piece of reporting Matthew produces is reviewed by an editing team before it is posted online or published in print — part of the *Free Press*'s tradition, since 1872, of producing reliable independent

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