Sick Notes in Manitoba
Research Update

March 2025

Summary and Methods

In almost every province, actions are being taken to eliminate sick notes to help free up physician time during a major national physician shortage. Manitoba is one of only two provinces that has yet to take action to limit sick notes.

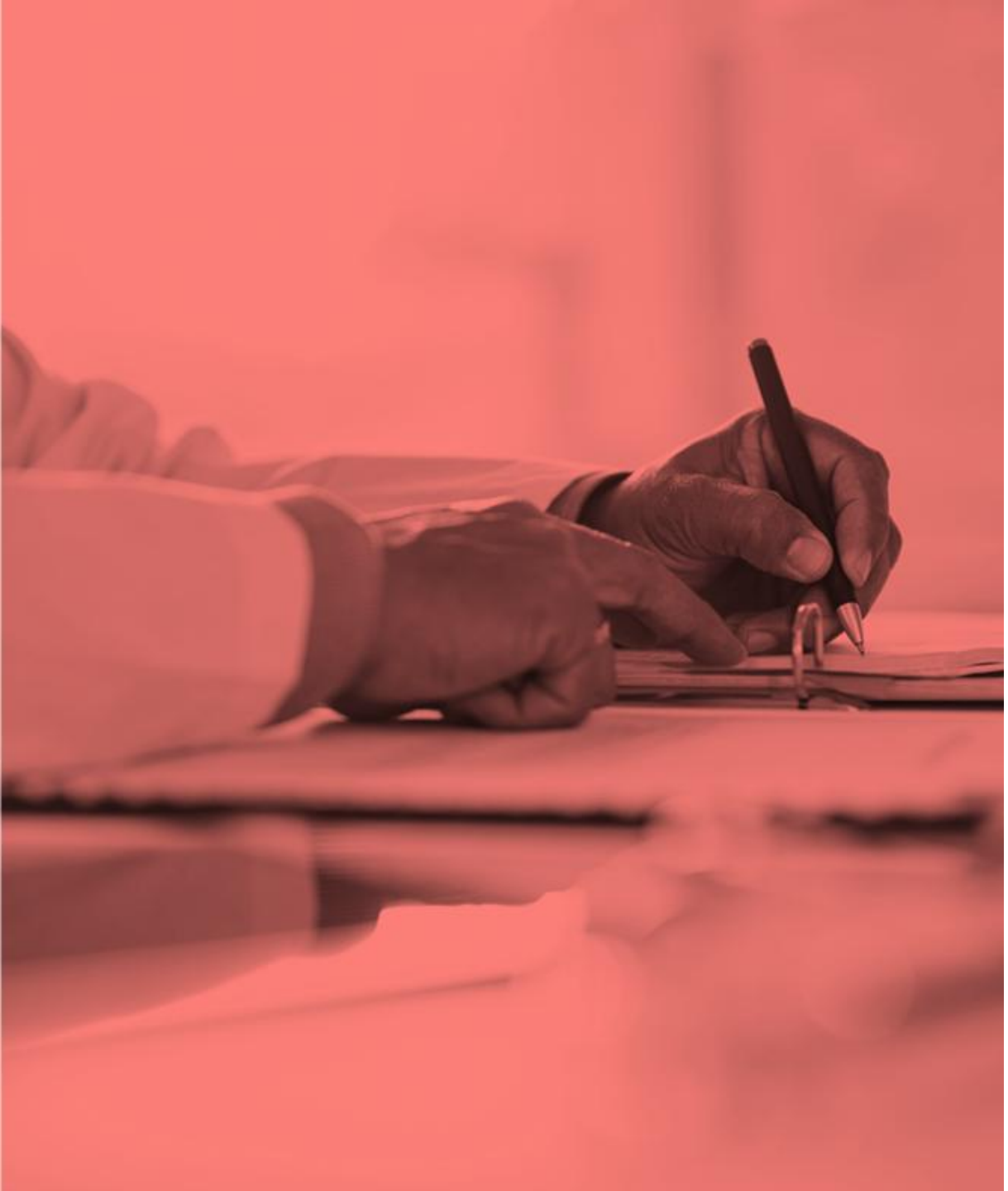
New research shows strong support among Manitobans to eliminate notes, including strong support among employers:

- Overall, 96% support eliminating or limiting sick notes. This include 87% who favour eliminating sick notes completely for short-term illness verification, and another 10% who prefer limits such as no sick notes until 10 or 7 days or absence in a 12-month period.
- Even among employers, there is 95% support for elimination or limits, including 86% who prefer eliminating sick notes.

There are over 600,000 sick notes written per year in Manitoba, taking up over 36,000 hours of physician time that could be redirected to providing patient care.

Earlier research by Doctors Manitoba found that sick notes aren't very effective for verifying illness, as over a third of patients no longer have symptoms to verify when they see their doctor for a note. The new survey confirms that over 70% of workers would go to work sick instead of getting a sick note, which raises concerns about workplace productivity.

Survey Methods: The research comes from a recent survey of Manitobans conducted by Doctors Manitoba. The survey was conducted online in February 2025 with 1,591 responses. Results were weighted to mirror Manitoba demographics including age and gender. The online poll was not random, but for comparison a comparable random survey would have a margin of error of +/- 2%, 19 times out of 20.



Definitions

Sick Note
A sick note is a document written by a doctor to verify an illness or injury that results in a short-term absence from work, school or other institution. Sick notes serve the sole purpose of illness verification.

Doctors Notes and Medical Certificates
There are other types of requests to physicians for medical advice beyond simple illness verification. These generally include medical advice that is used to inform decisions in the workplace or educational institution. For example:

- Accommodation notes
- Long term leave and return to work
- Functional assessments

There are thousands of employers and educational institutions in Manitoba. Each has created its own unique requirements or medical forms for these types of requests.

New Research Findings



Public Feedback

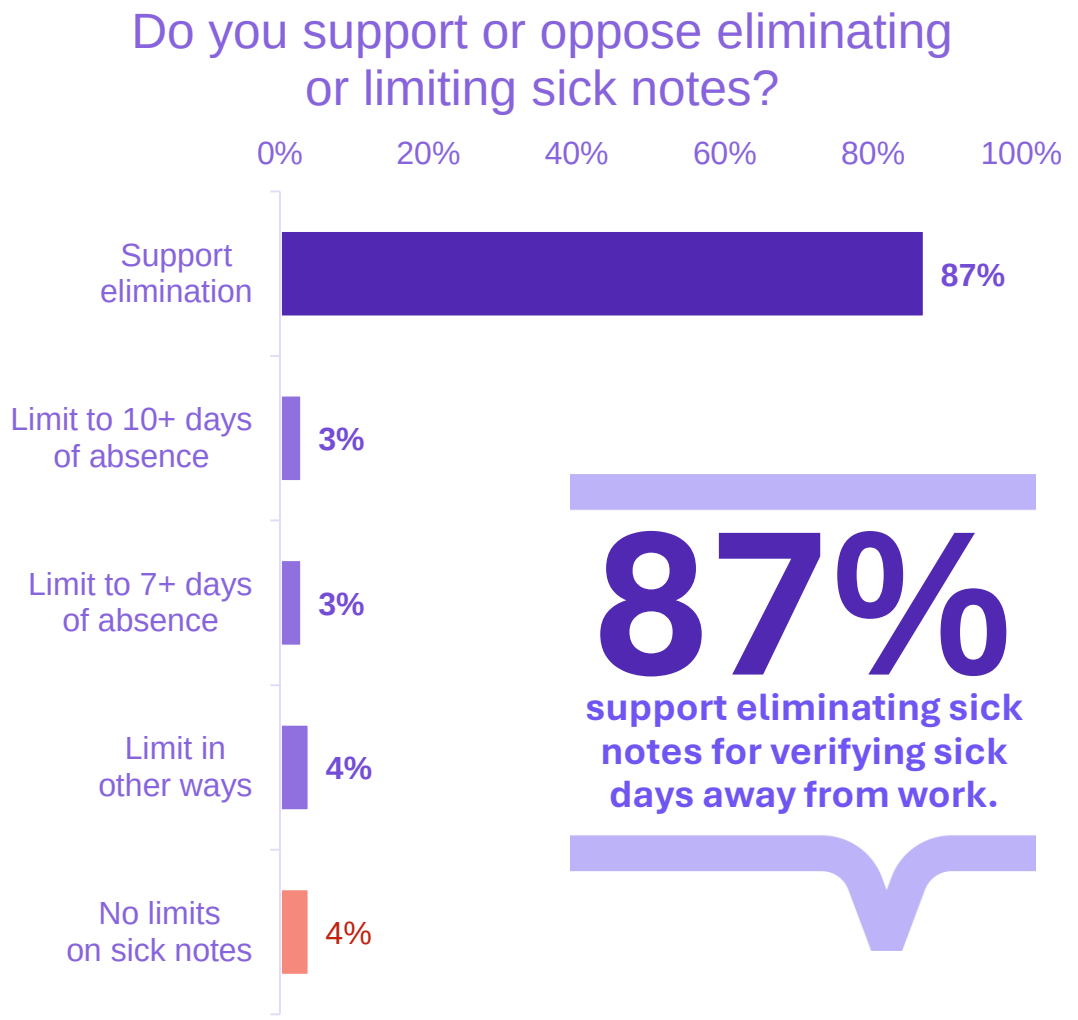
Strong support for eliminating sick notes.

Overall, 96% of Manitobans support eliminating or limiting sick notes for verifying sick time away from work, with the strong majority preferring full elimination:

- **87% of Manitobans support eliminating sick notes**.
- **An additional 10% support limits on sick notes** (e.g. limiting to use after 10+ or 7+ days of absence in 12-month period).

Only 4% prefer no limits on sick notes.

This is significantly higher than a recent national survey by Abacus, which found 72% of Canadians support legislation to restrict sick notes for short-term absences. It is not surprising to see much higher support for action in Manitoba, considering it is one of only two provinces that has yet to take action to limit sick notes.



Online panel survey conducted in Feb 2025. N = 1,591.

Employer Perspective

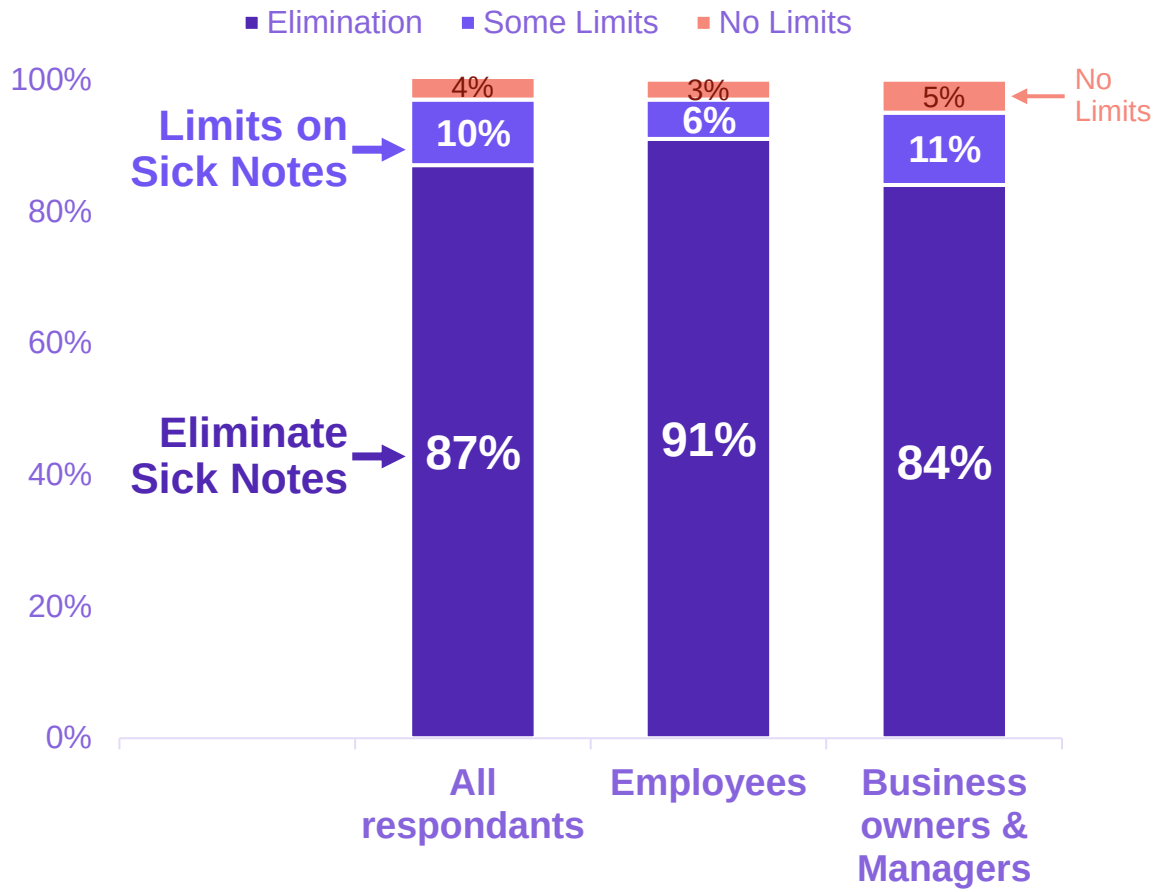
The survey found that among business owners and managers, there is still very strong support, with 95% agreeing sick notes should be eliminated or limited:

- 84% of employers support eliminating sick notes, compared to 87% overall.
- 11% of employers prefer limiting sick notes in some way, compared to 10% overall.

Only 5% of employers indicated there should be no limits placed on sick notes, very similar to the 4% overall.

This isn't a surprise, as businesses have consistently shown concern in recent years about the availability of health care services for their employees. A recent survey of small business owners by the CFIB found 89% support the reduction of unnecessary paperwork for doctors, emphasizing the need for physicians to focus on medically necessary patient needs (CFIB Your Voice survey, 2022).

Employers & employees both strongly support eliminating sick notes



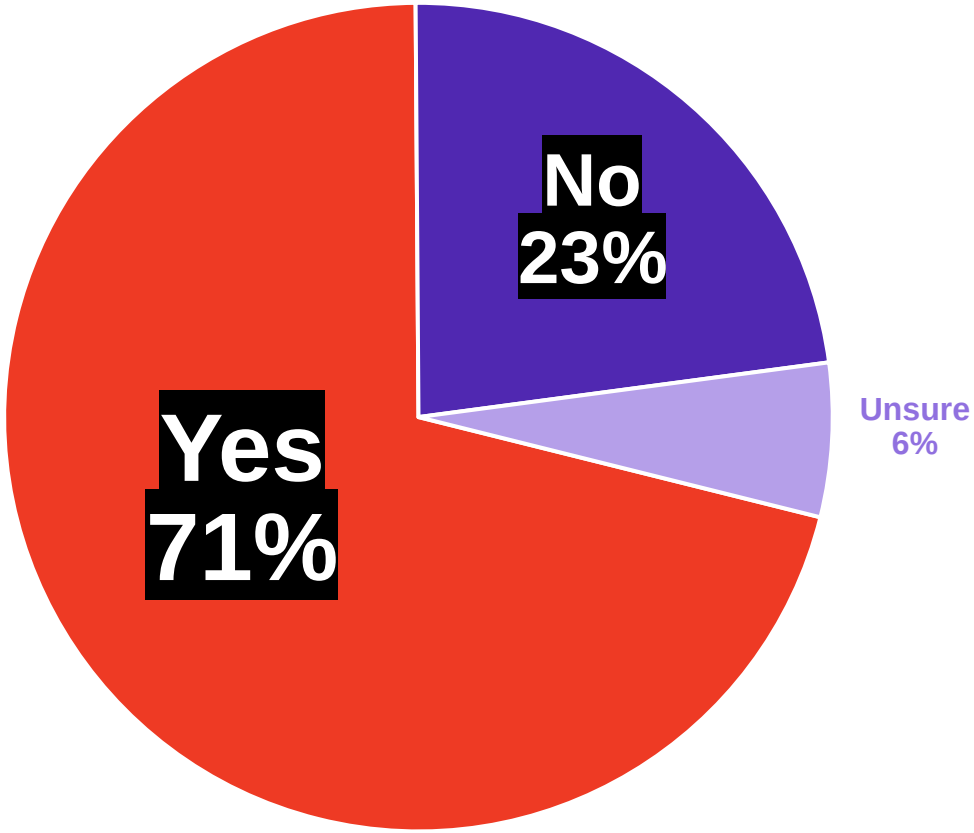
Online panel survey conducted in Feb 2025. N = 1,591.
N = 371 for business owners/managers.
N = 855 for employees not in management roles.

Risk to Productivity

Sick notes can affect workplace productivity, as some choose to go to work sick to avoid the hassle of getting a sick note. In fact, the survey found **over 70% of Manitobans have gone to work sick rather than getting a sick note**.

This is similar to a national survey from 2018 that found 82% of Canadians would go to work ill rather than get a sick note (Ipsos Poll, 2018).

Have you ever gone to work sick rather than get a sick note?



Online panel survey conducted in Feb 2025. N = 874, including a subset who identified as currently employed.

Background

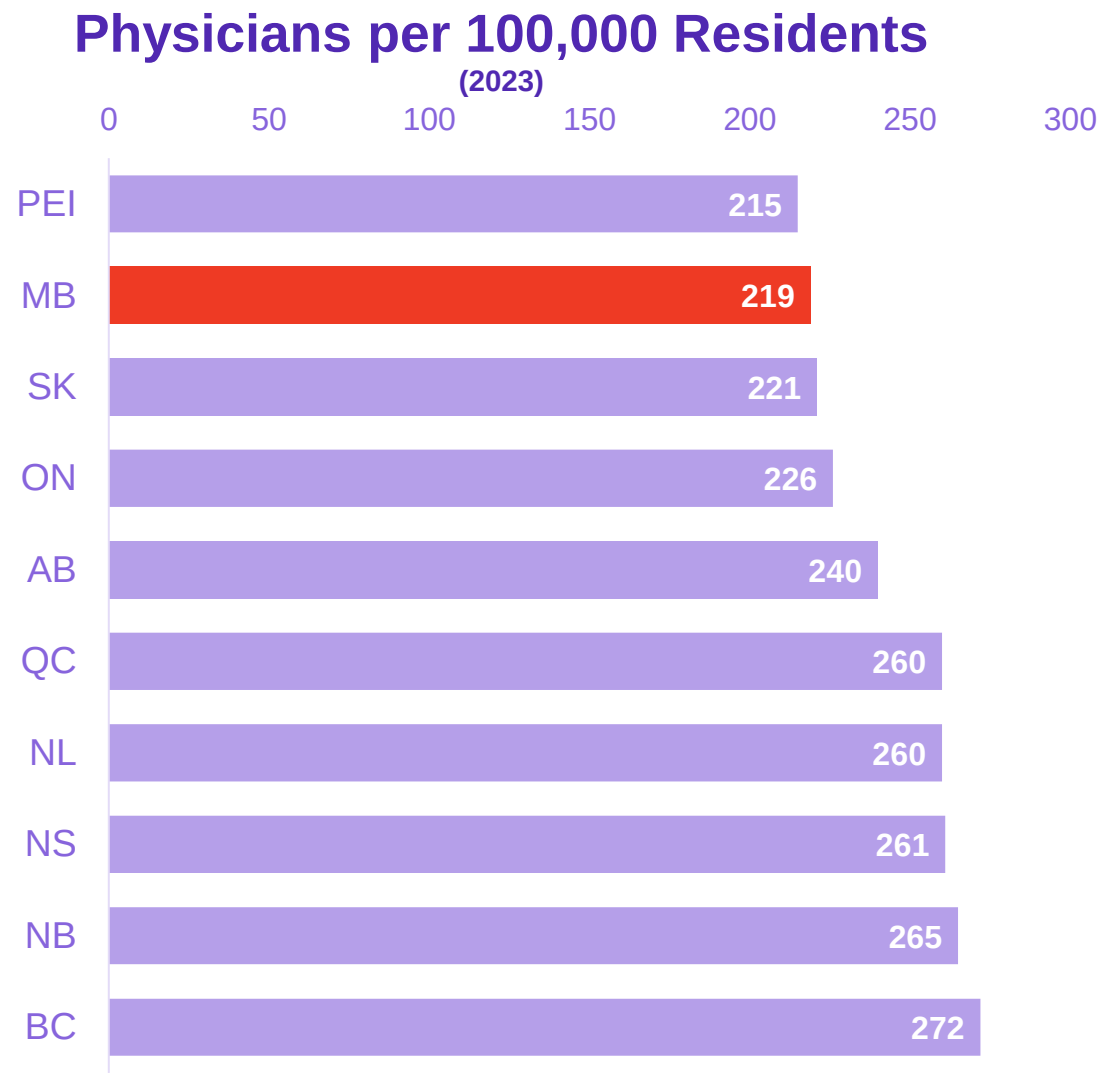


Why is this important?

Manitoba has a major physician shortage, with the second fewest physicians per capita in Canada. While recruitment has improved in recent years, 46% of existing physicians are considering leaving Manitoba, retiring, or reducing their hours in the next three years.

Excessive paperwork, including sick notes, is a major contributor. In fact, 37% of physicians in Manitoba who are considering leaving practice cite excessive administrative burden as a reason.

You can read more about the physician shortage in Manitoba here.



Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information



Doctors write

601,307

sick notes per year in Manitoba.

Sick notes take up 36,400 hours of physician time.

Source: Joint Task Force on Reducing Administrative Burdens for Physicians

Sick Notes Aren't Effective

False Verification for Employers



233,000 Unnecessary Visits per Year



$8+ Million Cost to Taxpayers

One Third

of the time, there are no symptoms for doctors to verify

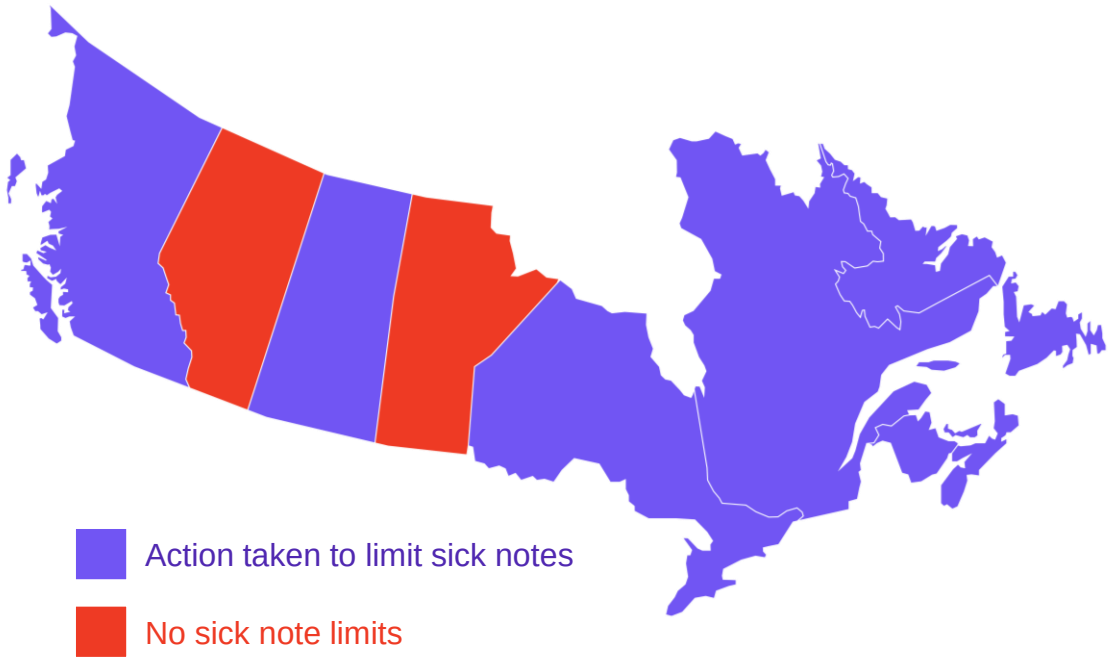
Source: Joint Task Force on Reducing Administrative Burdens for Physicians

Manitoba is behind

All provinces, except for Manitoba and Alberta, have taken action to limit sick notes. This includes recent actions in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Quebec.

Eliminating sick notes was one of six recommendations released last fall from Manitoba's Joint Task Force to Reduce Administrative Burdens for Physicians. Soon after, the Canadian Medical Association backed this recommendation with a national recommendation to eliminate sick notes.

All but two provinces have taken action to limit sick notes





Learn more at

SickNote.ca

Doctors Notes | Doctors Manitoba