

# PRIMER

# ACCESS TO PRIMARY HEALTH CARE



New Brunswick  
Health Council

Conseil de la santé  
du Nouveau-Brunswick

**JANUARY 2023**

# About the **New Brunswick Health Council**

The New Brunswick Health Council (NBHC) has a two-part mandate: engage citizens in ongoing dialogue about the improvement of health service quality in the province, and measure, monitor and publicly report on health service quality and population health.



## **ENGAGE**

The NBHC engages citizens in meaningful dialogue toward the improvement of health service quality.



## **MEASURE**

The NBHC measures, monitors, and evaluates population health and health service quality.



## **INFORM**

The NBHC informs citizens on the performance of the health system.



## **RECOMMEND**

The NBHC recommends improvements to the Minister of Health.

# About the **Provincial Health Plan**

In 2021, the Government of New Brunswick released its health plan  
***“Stabilizing Health Care: An Urgent Call to Action”***.  
This two-year health plan includes deliverables across 5 action areas:



Access to  
Primary Health  
Care



Access to  
Surgery



Create a  
Connected  
System



Access to  
Addiction & Mental  
Health Services



Support  
Seniors to  
Age in Place

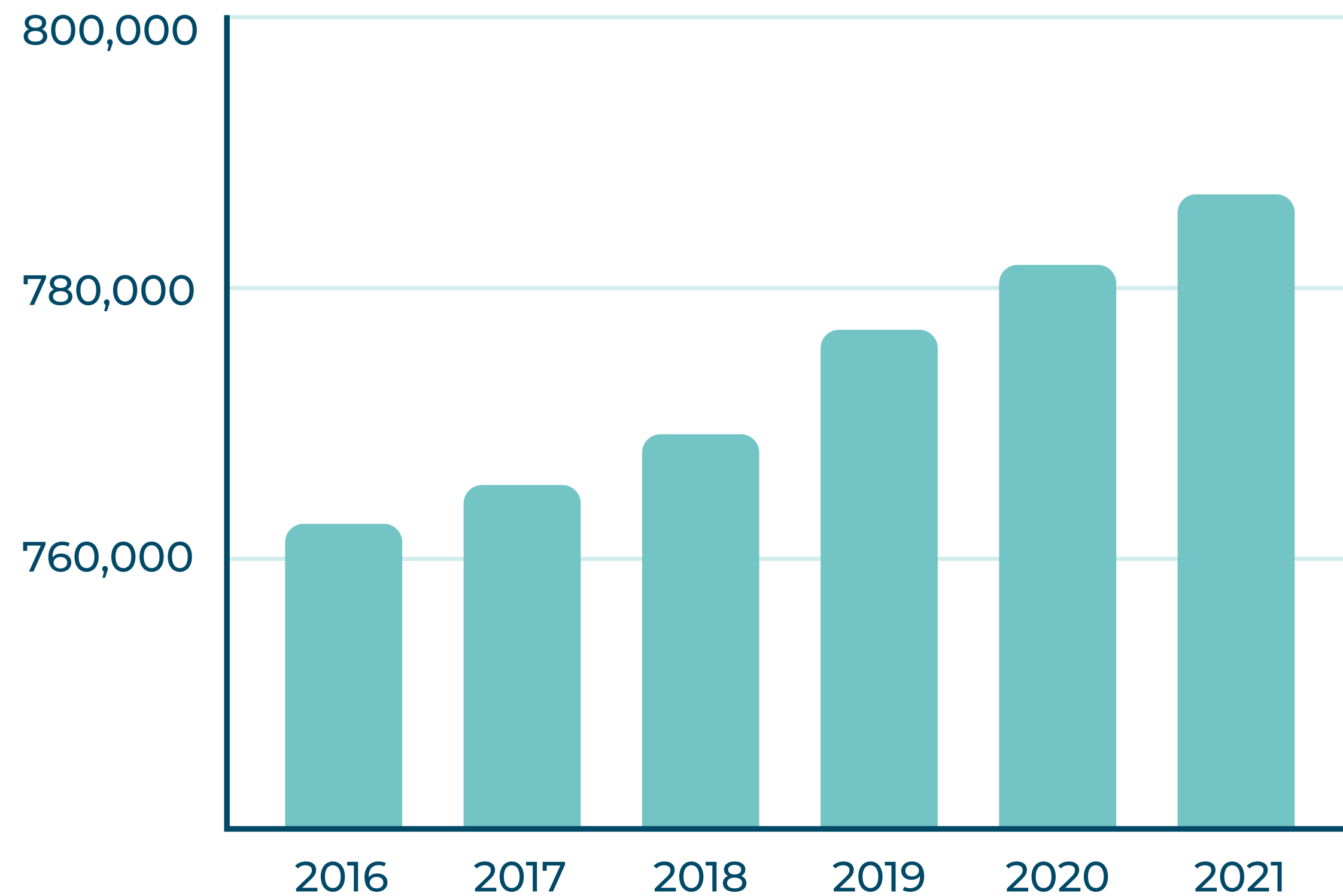
# What is **Primary Health Care**?

Primary health care is usually defined as the first point of entry with the health care system. It is generally delivered by a physician or nurse practitioner and includes services like medical appointments, walk-in clinics, mental health services, virtual care, and more.

In addition to providing citizens with a first point of contact with the health system, primary health care also coordinates health care services to ensure continuity of care and ease of movement within the system.



# New Brunswick's **population is shifting.**



## Our population is growing.

The population of New Brunswick has increased by 3.4% since 2016. Some areas of the province are experiencing more growth than others. For example, the population in Zone 1 (Moncton & South-East Area) has grown by 8.0% since 2016, whereas the population in Zone 5 (Restigouche Area) has decreased by 3.1% over the same time period.

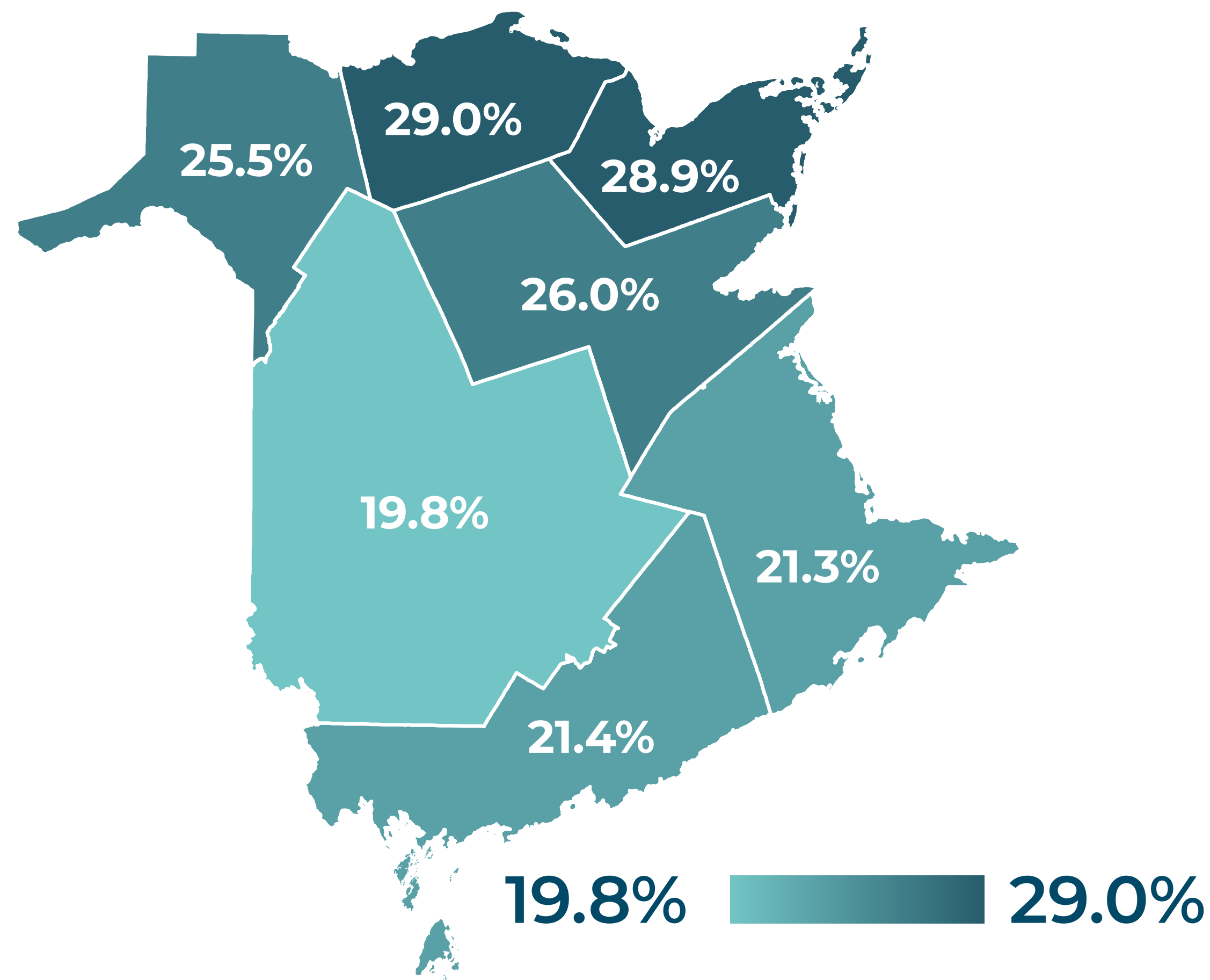
# New Brunswick's **population is shifting.**

## Our population is aging.

In New Brunswick, 22.5% of citizens are aged 65 and over. This number is expected to rise to over 28% of the population in the next 10 years<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Government of New Brunswick. (2021). Stabilizing Health Care: An Urgent Call to Action. Retrieved from **Stabilizing-health-care.pdf** (gnb.ca)

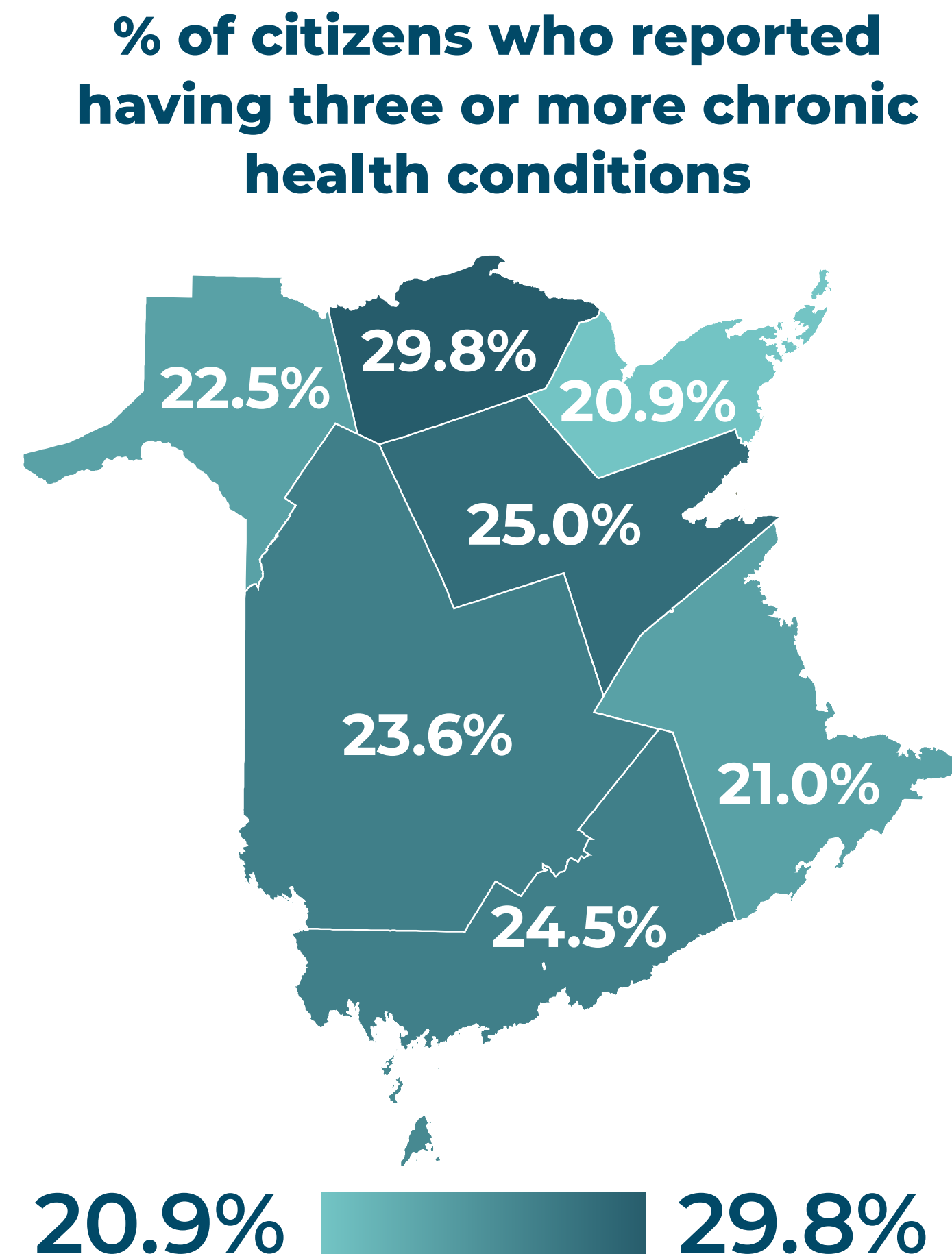
### % of citizens aged 65 and over NB Average – 22.5%



Source: Statistics Canada-Census 2021

Population shifts are resulting in an **increased demand for primary health care.**

More citizens are reporting living with chronic health conditions.

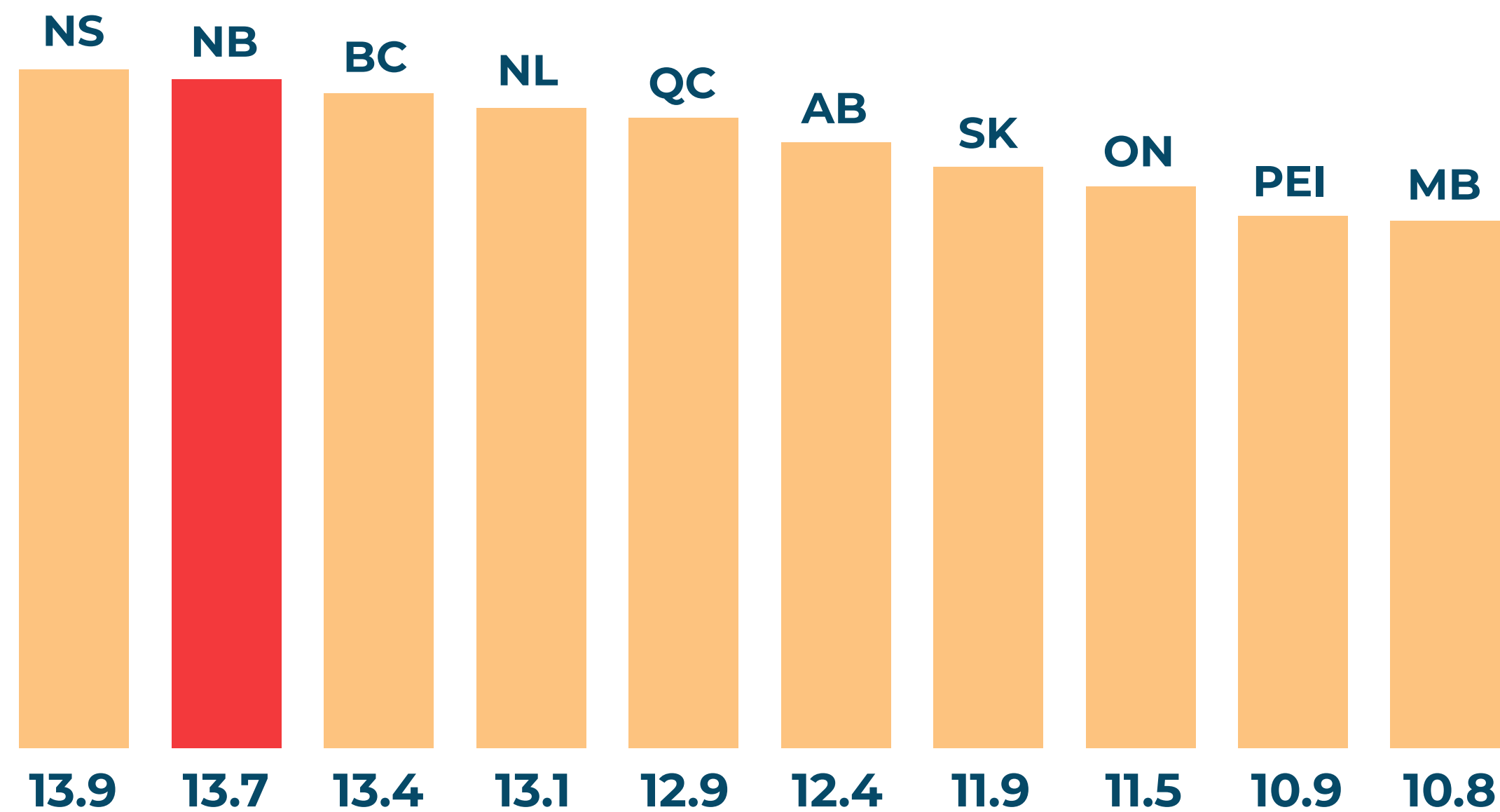


*Our province requires a better understanding of population health needs and health service quality at the community level in order to meet the increasing demands on the health care system.*

Source: 2020 edition of the NBHC's Primary Health Survey

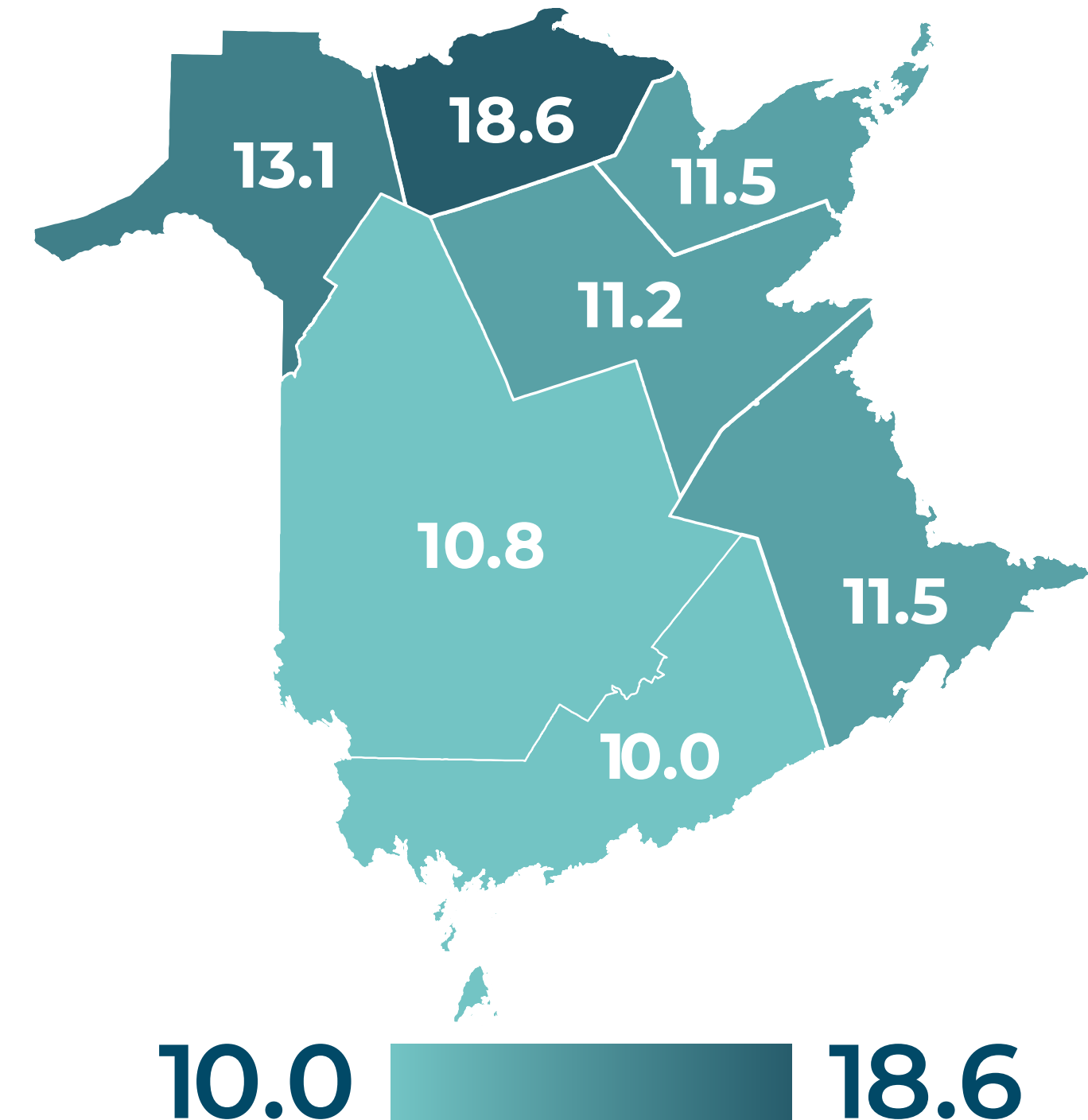
# New Brunswick has the **second highest family physician to population ratio** in Canada.

Number of physicians per 10,000 population (by province)



Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information. Supply, Distribution and Migration of Physicians in Canada, 2020

Number of physicians per 10,000 population (by zone)

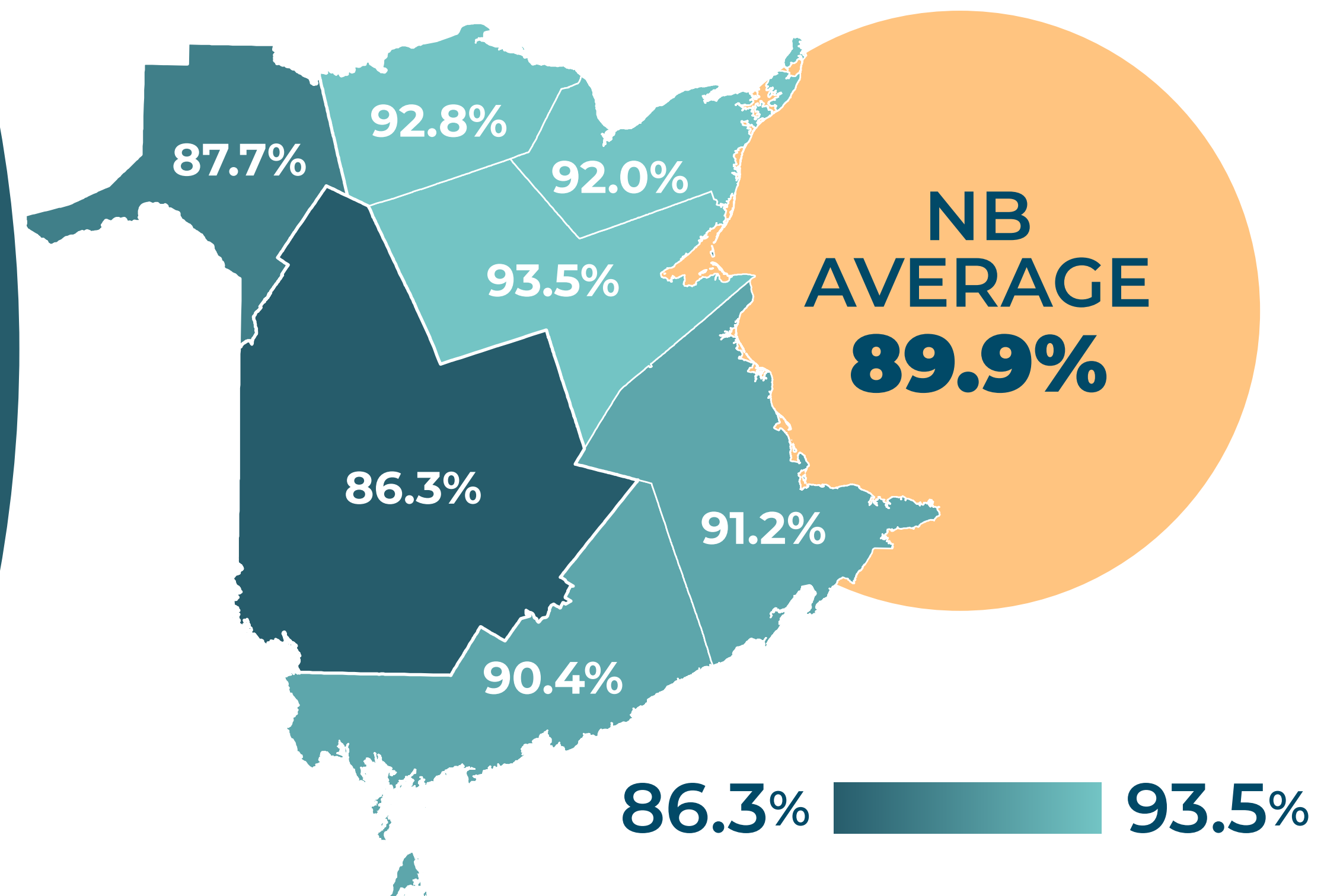


Source: Department of Health, medicare Decision Support System (MDSS)-Primary Care Physicians database (2019)

# 9 out of 10 New Brunswickers have a primary care provider

According to the 2020 edition of the Primary Health Survey, 89.9% of NB citizens have a primary care provider (either a family doctor [FD] or nurse practitioner [NP]). However, this percentage varies depending on where citizens live.

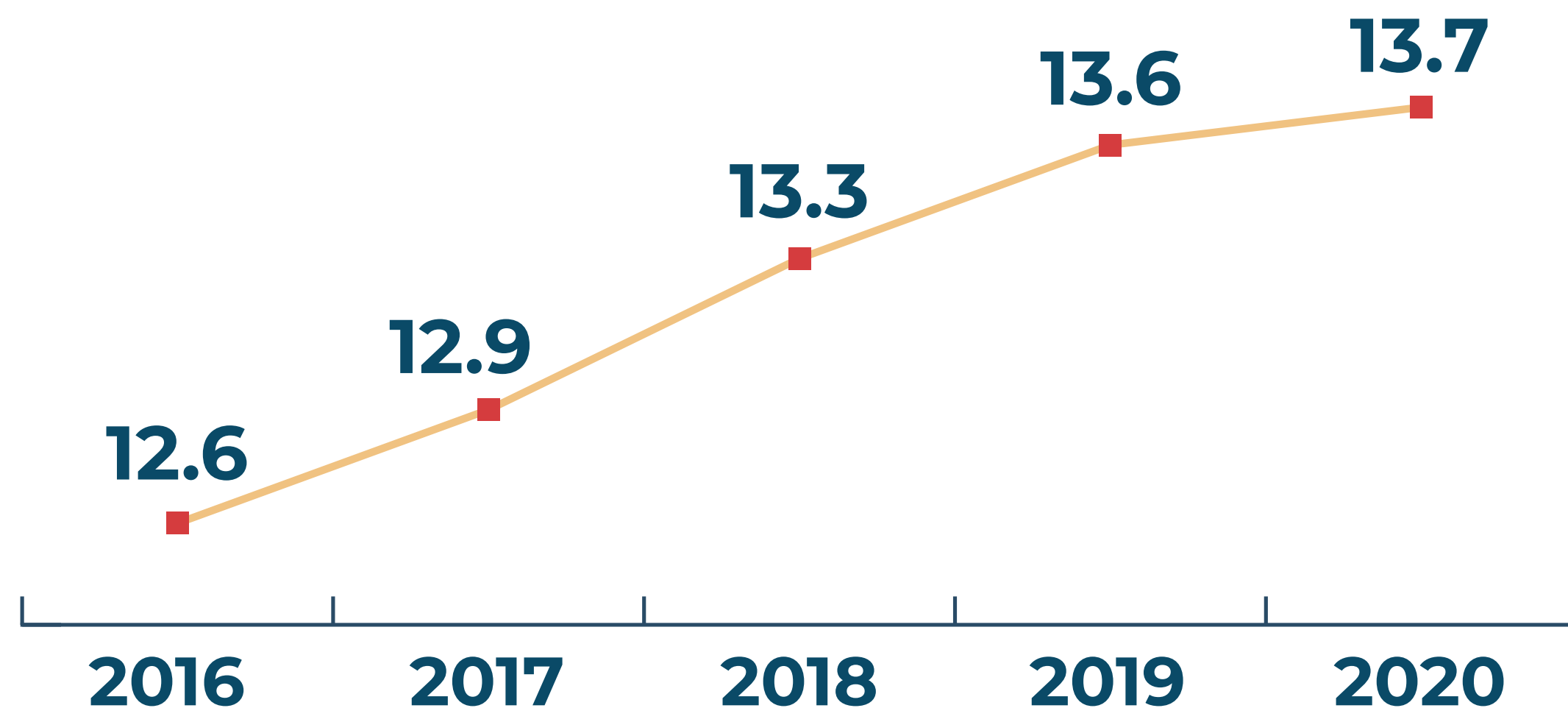
% of citizens who have a primary care provider (FD or NP)



Source: 2020 edition of the NBHC's Primary Health Survey

Despite an increase in family doctors, **citizens reported a decline in timely access to primary care services.**

Number of physicians per  
10,000 population (NB)



Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information. Supply, Distribution and Migration of Physicians in Canada, 2020

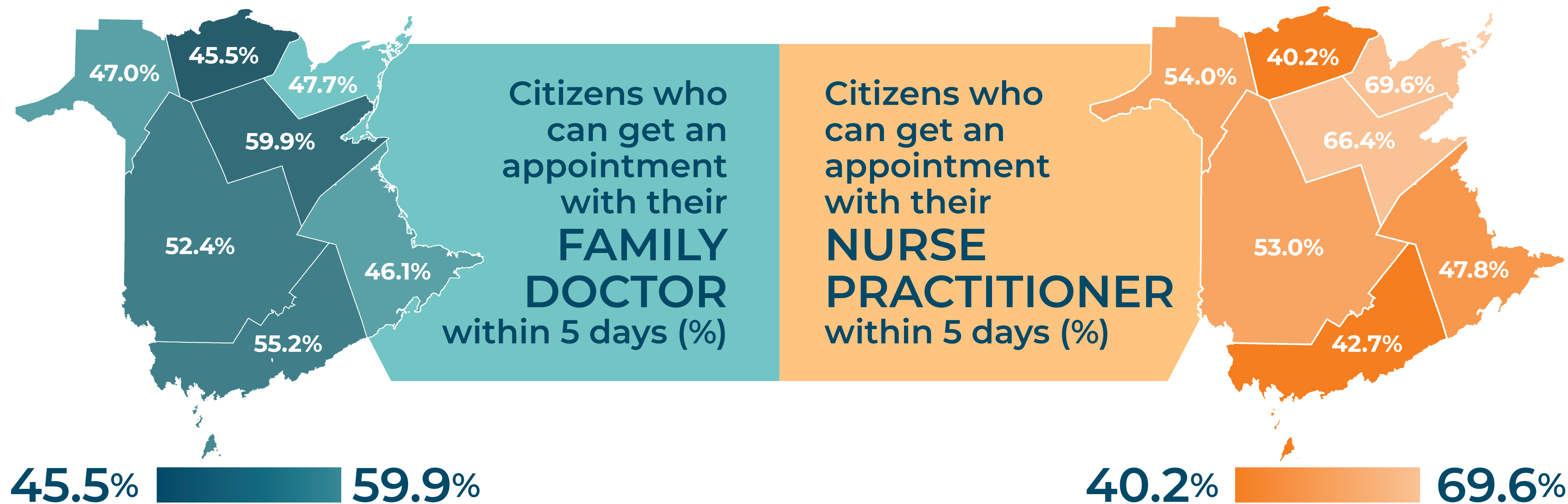
**In 2020, 50.8% of citizens reported they were able to get an appointment with their family doctor within 5 days, down from 55.6% in 2011.**

In addition, 51.7% of citizens reported they were able to get an appointment with their nurse practitioner within 5 days.

Source: 2020 edition of the NBHC's Primary Health Survey


Despite an increase in care providers, **citizens reported a decline in timely access to primary care services.**

**Timely access to a primary care provider varies by zone.**




Source: 2020 edition of the NBHC's Primary Health Survey

More citizens are turning to **alternative care** settings to access the primary care services they need.

The background of the left section features a light orange color with stylized orange buildings and upward-pointing arrows, symbolizing growth and positive trends.

In 2020, the percentage of citizens who reported visiting after-hours clinics or calling Tele-Care 811 increased.

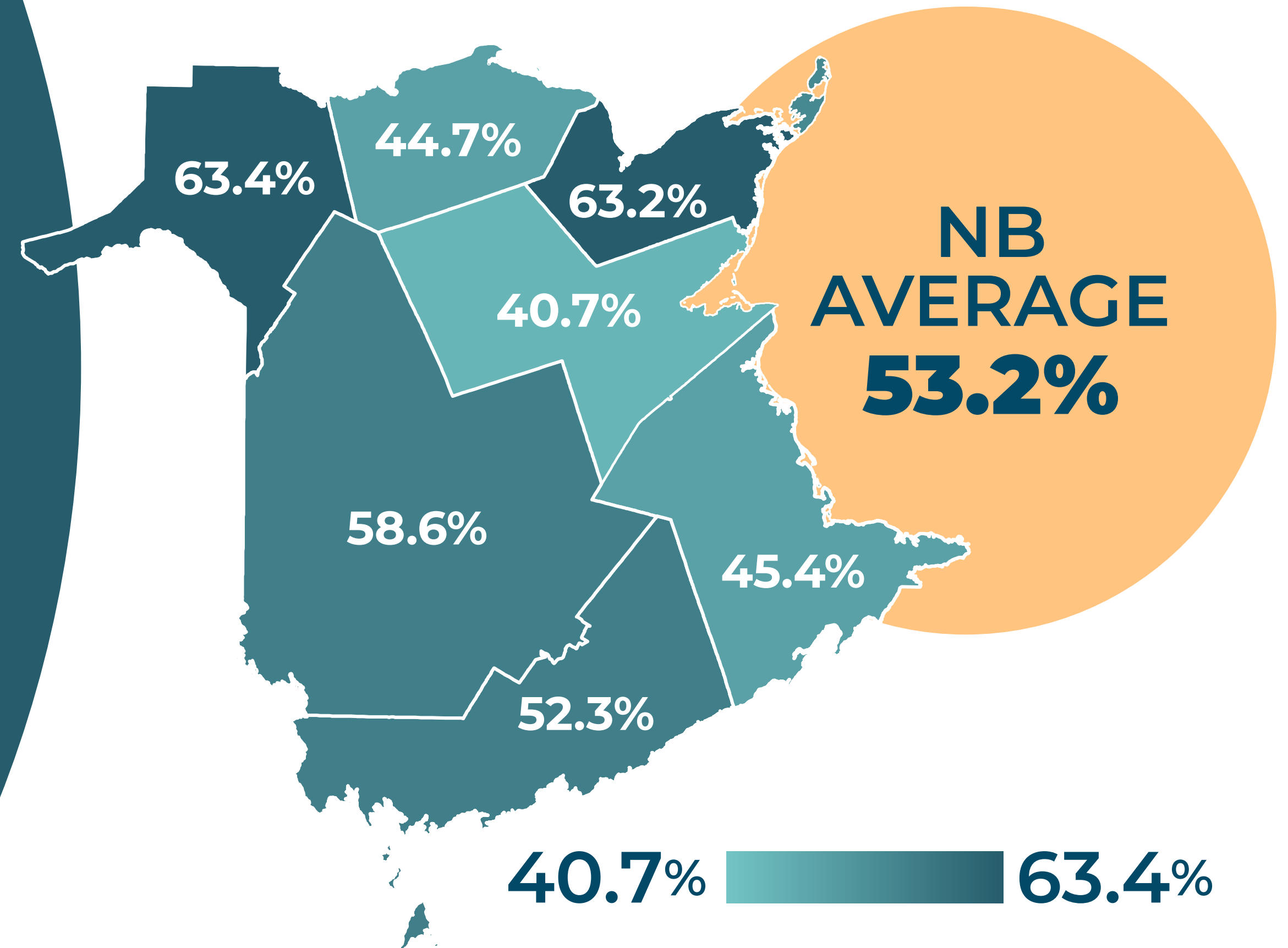
The background of the right section features a dark teal color with stylized teal arrows pointing downwards and a faint outline of an ambulance, symbolizing a decrease in hospital emergency department visits.

The percentage of citizens who reported visiting a hospital emergency department decreased as a greater percentage visited other settings.

More citizens are turning to **alternative care** settings to access the primary care services they need.

In New Brunswick, 53.2% of emergency room visits were classified as less urgent in 2020–2021, a decrease from 63.6% in 2010.

Percentage of less urgent emergency room visits (Triage level 4 and 5)



# **More information is needed about the organization of primary care resources in NB.**

There is limited information available about the time family physicians and nurse practitioners contribute to providing care to patients, and New Brunswick has one of the highest rates of family physicians in solo practice, as opposed to other forms of group practice.

# More information is needed about the **organization of primary care resources** in NB.



## **Several factors affect the availability of family physicians**

In addition to seeing patients in their offices, many physicians:

- ✓ treat patients in emergency rooms
- ✓ treat patients in after-hours clinics
- ✓ provide in-hospital or nursing home care
- ✓ perform non-clinical tasks

All this makes them less accessible

In addition, about 1 in 2 family physicians work alone.

🇨🇦 Well above the Canadian average of 15%

# FOR MORE INFORMATION

NBHC.CA



@NBHealthCouncil



/NBHC.CSNB



/New Brunswick  
Health Council –  
Conseil de la santé  
du Nouveau-  
Brunswick