

TAB 1

***Port Colborne-Wainfleet Community Response
To the NHS Hospital Improvement Plan***

October 6, 2008

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Executive Summary

The report is based on extensive research undertaken by a number of committees and working groups comprised of the citizens of Port Colborne and Wainfleet. These citizens are anxious to work with the NHS and the NHNB LHIN to ensure that access to health services is improved in their community and that a more cost effective and efficient health system is developed in the Niagara Region. The communities recognize the need for change in the health care system. However, these changes must ensure that timely access to health services is maintained and that the proposed changes are sustainable through the effective and efficient use of health human resources.

The communities of Port Colborne and Wainfleet expect that the NHS and the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network (HNHB LHIN) will give serious consideration to the recommendations that are set out in this report and engage the community further to ensure appropriate changes in service and a smooth transition to a new model of health care for Port Colborne and Wainfleet.

The Port Colborne General Hospital has a long history in meeting the health care needs of the communities of Port Colborne, Wainfleet and adjacent rural communities. In 2006, the population in **Port Colborne** was 18,599 and the population of **Wainfleet** was 6,601. In addition, there are approximately 10,000 residents of Sherkston Shores and another 4,000 seasonal residents who rely on the services of the Port Colborne General Hospital.

Many residents of Port Colborne and Wainfleet are currently traveling outside of these communities to receive care because of the acute shortage of family physicians in the area. Demographic data indicates that Port Colborne:

- Has the highest percentage of the population over the age of 75.
- Low percentage of the population with a university education.
- Median income level of \$24,444 versus \$25,832 in the rest of Niagara.
- 17% of the population receive social assistance compared with 13% in the rest of Niagara.
- Unemployment is at 7.4% in Port Colborne versus 6.1% in Niagara.

Research has indicated that these determinants of health indicate that there are higher needs for health care services among the residents of these communities. Many residents of the community are considered to be high risk for cancer, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse and other chronic illnesses. These determinants of health clearly indicate that there is a higher incidence and prevalence of disease among the residents of Port Colborne and Wainfleet.

Residents are sicker, have more chronic disease and are more dependent on the health care system (particularly the Emergency Department) than other residents of Niagara.

Based on our comprehensive assessment of the NHS HIP and discussions with key stakeholders in Port Colborne, Wainfleet and Niagara Region, there is a need to reconsider many of the proposed hospital program changes set out in the HIP. The following recommendations identify the key areas that require further research and investigation, prior to the implementation of any hospital program changes in Niagara.

Recommendation 1: The NHS, through the HNHB LHIN, must seek guidance from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care on the future role of small hospitals in Ontario. Reference should be made to the provincial strategic plan for health care, the ongoing developments at a provincial level for improving access to health care services and new models of primary care delivery that are being promoted by the Ministry of Health.

Recommendation 2: Prior to embarking on this significant transformation agenda, the NHS must find ways to rebuild trust with the communities of Port Colborne and Wainfleet by being open, honest and truthful with the citizens. Improved communications, regular town hall meetings, fulfilling its promises and being accountable to the community will go along way to rebuilding this trust with the community.

Recommendation 3: The NHS must conduct a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the proposed closure of the Port Colborne Emergency Department with the assistance of the family physicians in Port Colborne and the many other health care agencies in Port Colborne who rely upon the services of the Emergency Department.

Recommendation 4: The HNHB LHIN must ensure that no reduction in Emergency services is implemented at the Port Colborne General Hospital until a comprehensive range of alternative primary care services has been developed, emergency transportation services have been expanded and wait times at all other Emergency Departments have been improved to meet Ministry of Health standards in terms of quality of service and standards of care.

Recommendation 5: The NHS must be required to develop a detailed implementation plan showing timelines and a detailed financial analysis of all of the costs (both capital and operating) of all proposed service changes. There must also be a clear indication that the Ministry of Health or other funding agencies are prepared to provide the necessary funding for all new and expanded programs.

Recommendation 6: The NHS must prepare a detailed financial analysis of all of the cost of implementing the proposed plan including the need for extensive public education.

Recommendation 7: The HNHB LHIN must require the NHS to engage its communities more broadly and openly in finalizing the HIP and in the development of an implementation plan. Face to face meetings with community groups, key stakeholders, health care agencies, family physicians,

municipal representatives and town hall meetings must be part of the community consultation process.

Recommendation 8: The NHS must provide a detailed human resources plan that sets out the risks and benefits associated with the proposed program changes with regard to recruitment and retention of required health human resources. A specific plan for Port Colborne must be prepared given the magnitude of the program changes recommended in this community.

Recommendation 9: The NHS must address the following questions in advance of implementing the HIP:

- What is the cost of the needed changes to transportation in the region in order to support the HIP recommendations?*
- How will the additional transportation be funded? Will the public be paying deferred tax dollars to implement, maintain and operate a transportation system as opposed to maintaining the local hospital ED?*
- How would the NHS ensure reasonable access to services on days, weekends and holidays?*
- Will an aging population truly be able to utilize a transportation system between multiple communities?*

Recommendation 10: The NHS must develop a broad communications strategy that includes providing information as well as education on what services are available, where services are located, how services can be accessed, when services are available, and where citizens can get assistance about how to use the new system. A similar detailed communication plan will be required for all health care providers and health care stakeholders.

Recommendation 11: With fair and equitable access in mind, the NHS must review the need for the creation of single site programs. Based on this assessment, the best location for these single site programs must be determined to ensure that all residents of Niagara are able to access these services in a timely manner.

Recommendation 12: The NHS must work with the Port Colborne-Wainfleet Health Services Committee to plan and develop a comprehensive range of primary care services that would include 24/7 emergency services, access to family physicians, mental health services, geriatric services, a day hospital program, laboratory services, diagnostic imaging services and other services as defined by the health care needs of the community.