

Fort Erie and Port Colborne Community Engagement Questions and Answers

Why is Niagara Health hosting these community engagement sessions?

As we continue on our journey to transform hospital care in Niagara, we want to provide information and updates on our future plans for a three-site hospital system and hear directly from the residents we serve for input and feedback into our plan.

Why are you moving to a three-site hospital model?

We are transforming our hospital buildings and how we provide care. Our goal is to deliver seamless care to patients and their families across Niagara. We are replacing outdated, outgrown infrastructure with state-of-the-art facilities. They will be warm and welcoming, with modern technology, private rooms, more beds and services.

By bringing together our staffing and expertise at three modern hospitals, we will provide patients access to the highest quality care. Our new hospital system will significantly increase capacity to meet the needs of Niagara's growing and aging population.

Why does this change need to happen?

We must evolve to overcome the challenges of today's health care landscape. We are facing several major challenges: an aging and growing population, staffing shortages, disconnected care, outdated infrastructure and limited physical capacity.

All of our existing hospitals, aside from our St. Catharines site (The Marotta Family Hospital), are outdated. Our current sites in Port Colborne, Fort Erie and Niagara Falls are beyond the point of renovation to meet our future needs.

The changing health care landscape around us demands that we change to better serve patients and their families.

What will happen to the Fort Erie and Port Colborne Urgent Care Centres after the new South Niagara Hospital opens?

Following the opening of the new South Niagara Hospital, hospital programs and services from the Fort Erie and Port Colborne sites will be transitioned to the South Niagara and Welland hospitals. The municipalities will be given first right of refusal on the site in exchange for a portion of local share for the South Niagara Hospital. The future of the sites is the responsibility of the municipality. Our vision is for the municipalities to assist in providing community-run services such as primary care or diagnostic imaging and we are actively working with them to help make this a reality.

Will you commit to keeping the Fort Erie/Port Colborne sites open?

We know that people are concerned about maintaining health care services in their communities and we are committed to providing quality care for everyone in our region. Niagara Health will be not operating the Fort Erie and Port Colborne Site once the hospital programs and services are transition to the South Niagara and Welland Hospitals. These changes will occur when the new site is completed in 2028.

Can we advocate for more funding to keep the Urgent Care Centres (UCCs) open?

More funding alone will not fix the struggles Niagara Health is currently facing. The operating hours at our UCCs were reduced due to staffing/physician shortages and were not related to funding.

We simply don't have enough emergency trained physicians to operate our Emergency Departments (EDs) and UCCs around the clock and unfortunately with the realities of the health human resources shortages in Ontario and Canada, we don't see that significantly changing anytime soon.

What can we do to advocate for more primary care in our community and what has been done?

Niagara Health is working with the municipalities, the Ontario government, the Niagara Ontario Health Team -Équipe Santé Ontario Niagara and community partners to find working solutions to help bridge the primary care gap in those communities. We advocated to the government for support and funding, including supporting the application for primary health team funding, for which more than \$2 million was recently announced for southern Niagara.

We are working closely with the Region's physician recruiter to help attract more family doctors to Niagara. We are also in the final phases of creating a new leadership position – Chief of Primary Care, a role that will be central to ensuring collaboration between Niagara Health and community primary care.

We need your help to continue to advocate for more primary care supports in Niagara region and continue to promote Niagara as a great place to work and live.

Who will run primary care?

Family doctors are the foundation of Canada's health-care system. They are vital to preventative care, health education and the management of chronic conditions. Although Niagara Health is not responsible for the delivery of primary care services, we are working closely with municipalities, the Ontario government, the Niagara Ontario Health Team -Équipe Santé Ontario Niagara and community partners and family doctors to advocate for increased access to primary care and to support addressing those gaps in care. Niagara Health will not be operating primary care services.

What is Niagara Health doing to recruit more health professionals?

There is a global shortage of health human resources. We are competing globally for talent and are aggressively recruiting. Our teams are doing everything possible to alleviate these pressures while also being mindful that long-term solutions are necessary to prevent burnout and workforce shortages that contribute to staffing shortages. In the future, staff can look forward to working in leading, modern hospital facilities designed with patient care and wellness in mind. WELL certification at the new South Niagara Hospital will be a big recruiting tool to attract top talent to Niagara.

When the Marotta Family Hospital opened in 2013, we had an incredible amount of interest from health care professionals wanting to move to Niagara and work at a new hospital. We anticipate the same as the South Niagara hospital nears completion.

Some other steps we have taken include:

- Continuing to aggressively recruit locally, nationally and internationally for health human resources to Niagara Health.
- Working with community partners, including the Niagara Region, for an additional recruiter and promoting Niagara as a great place to live, work and play.
- Explored other models including the use of anesthesia assistants, supervised nurse sedation and GP anesthesia to expand our blended-care model.

How did Niagara Health plan for the increase in population growth and increasing number of seniors moving to the region?

Niagara Health is evolving to meet the needs of our growing and aging population. Our new hospital system will significantly increase capacity for the entire region. Planning for the South Niagara Hospital is based off Statistics Canada population census data and was continuously updated until a planning document was submitted to the Ministry of Health in 2020. Planning also took into account data conducted by Niagara Region demonstrating the region's growth into the future up to 2041. Understanding that Niagara has a growing population, data was also pulled from up-to-date building permits across the region.

Based on projected growth and age demographics, the South Niagara Hospital will feature a Wellness in Aging Centre of Excellence. The Centre of Excellence will include:

- Seniors' Wellness Follow-up Clinic
- Geriatric Rapid Assessment
- Geriatric Assessment Clinic
- Other services: The program will continue to work with internal and external partners to host needed services, such as falls clinic and/or caregiver support programming, within available space.

Snowstorms often close the roads in Fort Erie/Port Colborne a few times each winter, what are residents supposed to do for hospital care if the roads are closed?

We understand the importance of transportation for all residents of Niagara as it impacts access to care. We stressed this importance during our presentation to Niagara Regional Council.

Snowstorms often pose an issue even with local travel. Check with your local municipality for information on snow removal services and special rules in place during a snow emergency. Patients experiencing a medical emergency should always call 911. It is our understanding that during these extreme weather events, our partners at Niagara EMS take extra efforts to ensure increased access to ambulances for those experiencing medical emergencies.

What do you have to say to patients who feel that their health care is at risk if they have to drive further to access services?

All three hospital sites are strategically located in Niagara's three largest cities, which make up 70 per cent of the region's population. The remaining 30 per cent of the region's population live within an 11 to 28 minute drive to a hospital site.

Ontario Health seeks to ensure that 90 per cent of residents in a community receive emergency services within 30 minutes' travel time from their home. It is critically important to us that everyone in our community has access to high-quality, lifesaving care when they need it.

We have studied the geography alongside planning experts and these locations will provide the best access to care for the people of the entire Niagara region.

These drive times are well within the Ontario standards for emergency access. We believe this plan will improve access to care, and the patient experience, when you arrive at our doors.

There is a shortage of paramedics in the Niagara region. Won't the new hospital system increase offload delays?

There are a number of external factors contributing to ambulance offload issues, including lack of access to primary care; an inability to transition patients to home and community care; and the inability to move patients to long-term care due to lack of available spaces.

The new South Niagara Hospital Emergency Department will be able to handle 20,000 more visits a year – for a total of more than 92,000 visits.

Niagara Health has a growing network of community-based services that will help to address pressures on ED capacity by encouraging patients to receive care in the most appropriate setting within their community. We continue to work with our regional and provincial partners to develop innovative solutions to optimize healthcare capacity and timely access to care including hiring ED Technicians and additional health professionals including social workers, personal support workers and porters to support our ED teams.

How will closing the Fort Erie and Port Colborne UCCs impact ED wait times?

We are building a brand-new hospital with a large emergency department that has more capacity than the current ED at the Niagara Falls hospital. This means you will have a private and appropriate space in our new hospital if you need to visit the ED.

By consolidating our services, we will also be bringing together all our staff trained to deliver emergency services so we can see you faster. We are also working together with our local health partners to create new ways for patients to access care in community settings, including through family doctors, for concerns that would previously have been cared for in the UCC.

By ensuring every patient has access to primary care, we will improve the overall health of residents in the region.

Where will staff from the Fort Erie/Port Colborne Urgent Care Centres go after the sites have been closed?

Niagara Health is creating a robust human resources plan across all sites to support the transition to three sites. More engagement with union partners and staff will be done in the coming years.

What happened to the doctors and staff who worked at the UCCs when you reduced hours?

The doctors who were trained to do emergency medicine were asked to take on shifts in the EDs and all other staff were given the opportunity to be redeployed in other parts of the hospital. Despite our numerous sites, everyone who works at Niagara Health works for one hospital system.

What will happen to the current Niagara Falls site after the new South Niagara Hospital opens?

Following the opening of the new South Niagara Hospital, we will be transitioning the Niagara Falls site to the City of Niagara Falls in exchange for local share for the new hospital. The city will determine the best use of the site to benefit the community.

What will happen to the Fort Erie and Port Colborne Sites?

Following the opening of the new South Niagara Hospital, programs and services from Fort Erie and Port Colborne will be transitioned to the South Niagara and Welland hospitals.

We are working with the municipalities to determine how the system and community can best use the Fort Erie and Port Colborne infrastructure to close gaps in care. We have five years to continue planning and to prepare.

Will the South Niagara Hospital offer services that support maternity care?

Our Women's and Babies' program at the St. Catharines hospital was developed in consultation with world experts. By centralizing these services at the St. Catharines hospital only, we are making the best use of the latest technology and equipment, human resources and training, and in turn enhancing patient care, patient safety and quality of work life.

It is a model that has attracted new physicians looking for communities in which to set up practices and serves as a medical teaching unit for both doctors and nurses. Patients are cared for in a state-of-the-art facility by health care providers who are experts in maternity, newborn and women's health care.

Mothers and babies are cared for by our passionate and dedicated health care team in our bright and spacious, family-centred facility. We offer state-of-the-art birthing suites and quality, safe new mother and baby care that are a model for hospitals across the province.

How will the new hospital support the Indigenous population?

The new South Niagara Hospital will be built to include an Indigenous Healing Centre, co-designed with Indigenous community members. This space will provide a culture-informed space to use for traditional health practices, ceremonies and conversations with patients and families. The new site will also have an Indigenous Healing Garden that will offer a feeling of grounding and connection to Mother Earth.

Niagara Health also has an Indigenous Health Services and Reconciliation team that will identify and act on priorities that ensure inclusive, equitable and compassionate health care journeys for all Indigenous patients and their families across our hospital sites.

When will the new South Niagara Hospital be complete?

The South Niagara Hospital is scheduled to open to patients in the summer of 2028. The hospital will reach substantial completion in early 2028 and will be turned over to Niagara Health approximately six months before opening. We have an extensive plan to transition health care services into the new facility, which includes orientation for staff and physicians, volunteers and the community.

Will the new hospital increase MRI capacity for the region?

The South Niagara Hospital will have two MRI machines on site, increasing MRI diagnostic capacity for the Niagara region by 74 per cent.

How confident is Niagara Health that we get approval for the Welland site redevelopment?

Ontario Health is fully aware of the need to redevelop our current Welland Hospital site and we are actively working with the provincial government towards securing necessary approvals.

Further community engagement on the future of the Welland Hospital will occur to ensure it has the right mix of services for the community.

Will there still be 24/7 emergency services at the Welland Hospital?

There is no wrong door for patients. There will be emergency services at Welland Hospital that will give patients 24/7 access to emergency medicine trained doctors, nurses and other staff. Patients will have access to diagnostic services such as x-ray, CT and lab tests. EMS will continue to bring patients to Welland when appropriate. When a higher level of care or more specialized care is required, for example, critical care or cardiac care, patients will be transferred to either the new SNH or the Marotta Family Hospital. Patients will have access to the full suite of hospital services and care available at Niagara Health regardless of what site they present to. We are one system that is designed around centres of excellence that care for patients.

What types of hospital beds will be available at Welland?

Based on the needs of the Niagara population, specifically the large number of seniors with chronic conditions, the site will be a seniors-focused campus of care. This includes complex care beds which are intended for people with chronic conditions, slow rehabilitation, transitional beds for individuals waiting for long-term care or home care services, and palliative care beds.

How are you ensuring that the new Hospital Information System will be safe and secure and protect not only our health care records but won't be hacked and impact programs and service delivery?

The new Hospital Information System (HIS) is being designed and implemented with the highest level of security to ensure that patient data and personal information remain secure. We have conducted extensive testing to ensure the new HIS meets our high quality assurance and have worked closely with our Information Communication and Technology team to mitigate any potential risks during the transition and implementation period.