

MEDIA RELEASE

Rural Health Hubs - Espanola and North Shore Stakeholders Working Together to Improve Care Coordination for All Residents

January 19, 2017 - The North East Local Health Integration Network's (NE LHIN) two Rural Health Hubs -- Espanola and North Shore -- are working together to better coordinate care for local residents.

This past August, both the North Shore Health Network and the Espanola Regional Hospital and Health Centre were announced by Premier Wynne as two of the early adopters of the Rural Health Hub sites in Ontario. Supported by the NE LHIN, hospitals in these areas received funding to collaborate with stakeholders to identify health care needs and develop a locally driven plan to address them.



Mary Ellen Luukkonen

“Rural Health Hubs are an opportunity to better coordinate care for people living in rural areas where geography and other factors make it difficult to deliver the same services found in urban areas,” said Sherry Frizzell, NE LHIN Director of Home and Community Care. “What’s unique about what’s happening in the North East is that the two Rural Health Hubs are working together to develop their models of care for residents.”

The Espanola hospital and the North Shore Health Network, which have a history of collaborating, have partnered to create a project team led by Mary Ellen Luukkonen, a Registered Nurse who has worked in positions of senior leadership including Chief Nursing Officer for the Sault Area Hospital and North Shore Health Network, as well as Associate Dean of Health at Sault College. Luukkonen along with Dr. Janet McLeod, a primary care physician who has worked in rural settings for more than two decades, have been meeting with health care providers in the area to talk about the Rural Health Hub model and identify local needs and opportunities to strengthen service delivery.

“The vision of the Rural Health Hub is to create an enhanced collaborative model that supports a client’s seamless health journey across the continuum of care,” Luukkonen said. “We are looking for partners, including families, patient/clients, and caregivers, to help us shape this local model of care.”

Each Rural Health Hub plan will be developed through the efforts of both LHIN-funded and non-LHIN funded providers from acute care, primary care, long-term care, mental health and addictions, palliative care, home and community care, public health, and social services. The hubs will be seeking guidance from patients and families, as well as municipalities. Some of the goals of the hubs include:

- Creating a model driven by the collaborative efforts of local stakeholders and based on the needs of people in its area.

- Exploring innovative strategies for home and community service delivery.
- Developing quality improvement plans across sectors.
- Creating simplified pathways for people to access care.
- Enhancing existing partnerships between the providers where appropriate.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- **How many Rural Health Hubs has the province funded?** Five early adopter sites have been funded. The North East and North West LHINs both have two sites. This reflects the large geographical areas that many health care centres serve in the Northern Ontario.
- **What is the difference between a Health Link and a Rural Health Hub?** A Health Link is designed to foster collaboration between health and social service providers to better coordinate care for medically complex patients – those with multiple health conditions who see a large number of providers – by working with them to develop individual care plans. A Rural Health Hub is designed to improve coordination of care for *all* people in a given area by bringing all the health care providers together through enhanced partnerships and to provide patients with ready access to a comprehensive list of health care services.
- **Can a Rural Health Hub and Health Link operate in the same area or overlap?** Yes. Both are working to improve the coordination of care across the continuum of both local health and social service providers– Health Links are focused on medically complex individuals and Rural Health Hubs on all residents’ needs.
- **Will every Rural Health Hub be structured the same?** No. As the Multi-Sector Rural Health Hub Advisory Committee, struck by the province, explained: “Each rural health hub will be locally defined and tailored to the community. A rural health hub is flexible, not one size fits all, is innovative, based on local needs and provides coordinated access to care.”
- **How many LHIN funded health service providers does each Rural Health Hub include?** At this point, 19 have been identified in the Espanola area and 29 in the North Shore Health Network area.

For more information:

- **Media questions:** Contact Lara Bradley, Communications Officer with the North East LHIN, at lara.bradley@lhins.on.ca or 705-674-1492
- **To get involved in the Rural Health Hub in Espanola or North Shore:** Participation from families, patients, clients, and caregivers is especially welcome! Contact Mary Ellen Luukkonen, Project Lead, by calling 705 356-2265 ext. 2523 (Bea Rodh, Project Support Assistant)