



## Administrative Report

### Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

**To:** Warden MacDonald and Members of Essex County Council

**From:** Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA  
Chief Administrative Officer

**Date:** Wednesday, May 01, 2024

**Subject:** Addressing Healthcare Needs in Essex County

**Report #:** 2024-0501-CAO-R08-SZ

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#### Purpose

To provide County Council with a high-level review of municipal opportunities to contribute to meaningful solutions to address the healthcare needs in our region.

#### Background

At its regular meeting held on November 15, 2023, County Council passed the following resolution:

##### **337-2023**

**Moved By** Chris Gibb

**Seconded By** Michael Prue

*That Essex County Council request for Administration to develop a report on how to address the health care needs of the region.*

The resolution stemmed from the discussion of the historic funding of the Physician Recruitment Office in collaboration with local hospital partners. In 2022, at the time of the retirement of the recruiter, services and funding ceased. The County of Essex Budget has not included funding for physician recruitment since.

According to a recent study commissioned by the Ontario College of Physicians, 2.3 million Ontarians are currently without a family doctor. Adding to the healthcare crisis are the impacts of an aging population, increased mental health and addiction issues, over capacity hospitals and

burned out health care providers. While adding physicians to the system is needed, graduating physicians are growing less interested in starting family-based practices and those that do, generally take on a third of the number of patients of retiring practitioners. It is predicted that the number of Ontarians without a family doctor will only grow. Focusing solely on physician recruitment cannot be the answer: other models of care need to be found.

Healthcare is a combined responsibility of the federal and provincial government. The federal government is responsible for setting and administering national standards for the health care system through the Canada Health Act. In Ontario, the Ministry of Health is responsible for administering the health care system and providing services to the Ontario public.

As the level of government closest to residents, Ontario municipalities and their elected officials are often faced with public pressure to address the realities of a system in crisis. This report attempts to highlight both the challenges and opportunities for the County of Essex.

## **Discussion**

The County of Essex can play an important role in addressing healthcare issues facing our residents. Below is a summary of some of the key actions that can be undertaken.

### **Providing Services**

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A number of integrated health services are currently managed and/or provided by the County. These services include:

- Paramedic Services: Essex Windsor Emergency Medical Services (EWEMS)
- Long-Term Care (LTC) Services: Sun Parlor Home (SPH)
- Housing Services: Housing with Supports (HwS)

The County of Essex plays an important role in supporting the healthcare needs of our region's residents by continuing to manage/operate these services. These services are paid for through a number of joint funding agreements with the provincial government and other local municipal partners, including funding from the County of Essex. As the cost to provide these services escalate, it is important that funding also increase. Provincial funding models that are delayed in covering actual costs represent a challenge for municipalities and result in the need to cover operating and capital shortfalls through the tax levy. While some of the funding is formula-based, others are application-based. In an application-based model, the

County of Essex is challenged to compete against its peers for provincial dollars. Adding to the struggle is that all too often, the pool of funds available is inadequate to address the magnitude of the need across the province.

Managing capacity, specifically within EMS, is also a challenge. Ambulance Offload Delays (AOD) and subsequent periods of reduced ambulance coverage in the community are illustrative of the symptoms of hospital capacity constraints. The County of Essex, through recommendations made by the Chief of EMS and corresponding increases to the County Budget, have made significant contributions to addressing capacity issues. Examples include additional front-line Paramedics, Community Paramedics, ambulances and the recent funding of Paramedic supervisors in the communication centre to help balance regional flow.

Decisions to expand service delivery beyond the County's core EMS, LTC and HwS programs should be weighed carefully. Evaluating whether other levels of government and/or other healthcare agencies/partners are responsible for expanded services should be the first step. Ideally, the County of Essex should compliment not compete or duplicate services that are the responsibility of others and the County levy should not be viewed as double taxing residents for services that are funded through other mechanisms. The reality however is that there is a disconnect between the level of service being provided and the public's expectation of that service. County Council is within its authority to respond to service delivery expectations by deciding whether or not to extend service into areas that are the responsibility of other levels of government.

## **Participating in Regional Health Initiatives**

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The County of Essex furthers regional healthcare by participating in various initiatives. Some of these key regional initiatives include:

- Windsor Essex County Health Unit
- Windsor Essex Ontario Health Team
- Windsor Essex Community Opioid and Substance Strategy
- Mental Health and Addictions Network
- Access and Flow Subregion Table
- Community Safety and Well Being Plan
- Regional Affordable Housing Strategy

The County of Essex contributes both funding and professional expertise to these endeavors. By their nature, these initiatives illustrate the broad

spectrum of factors influencing the health of our region's residents. Supporting initiatives that focus on proactive approaches to healthcare will reduce the pressure on health services that are more reaction based.

## **Advocacy**

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Sharing our unique healthcare needs with decision makers will always be vital to improving services for our residents. The County of Essex advocates for the healthcare needs of our community in a number of ways:

- Delegations to Ministry representatives
- Engaging local MPPs and MPs in direct conversations
- Partnering with other local health agencies on projects and funding requests
- Leveraging County Council meetings to highlight service delivery challenges/successes and educate the public

The County of Essex now has an established practice of applying, preparing and reporting out on its delegation campaigns. Numerous members of County Council and Administration participate on boards and committees at the association and provincial levels to share the story of Essex County. Advocacy efforts have resulted in provincial investment and recognition of our innovative and effective programs and services.

## **Supporting Healthcare Infrastructure**

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Providing quality healthcare requires adequate equipment and facilities. The County of Essex is committed to a number of capital funding programs aimed at ensuring service delivery is supported by appropriately managed physical assets.

- Asset Management EWEMS
- Asset Management SPH
- Asset Management IPS

Through the Corporation's Asset Management Plan, buildings, fleet and equipment are monitored for condition quality and remaining useful life. Budgets include contributions to in year capital replacement programs and asset management reserves to ensure the County can maintain its level of EMS and LTC service. Beyond the core assets in EMS and at SPH, the County contributes to the region's health network by planning for roadway infrastructure to support transportation routes to the new regional hospital. A challenge for the County presently is the lack of a robust regional transit system. Improved access to our region's hospitals and primary care facilities

would help alleviate the strain on EMS and calls to 911 as a means of transportation.

- Funding WEHS
- Funding ESHC

The County of Essex has also committed funding to support the capital development of the Windsor Essex Hospital System (up to a maximum of \$100 million) and Erie Shores Healthcare (up to a maximum of \$2 million).

## **Financial Implications**

The Corporation's Budget includes funding for core EMS, LTC and HwS services. Also included in the External Commitments Budget are contributions to support the Community Safety and Well Being Plan and capital contributions to the new regional hospital and our only County hospital, ESHC. The cost of administrative support to perform advocacy work and participate on various regional boards, committees and discussion tables is absorbed through regular staff wages and not expressly quantified.

## **Conclusions**

The County of Essex plays a key role in supporting the health of our residents and has a proven record of contributing expertise and funding to a number of programs and services. Administration supports the continuation of existing efforts. Expansion or re-introduction of suspended services should be evaluated within the context of the County's legislative responsibility, expertise and funding affordability.

## **Consultations**

Justin Lammers, Chief EWEMS

Jayne Brooks Keller, Administrator SPH

Allan Botham, Director of Infrastructure and Planning Services

Melissa Ryan, Director of Financial Services / Treasurer

## **Recommendation**

That Essex County Council receive report number 2024-0501-CAO-R08-SZ, Addressing Healthcare Needs in Essex County as information.

## Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

*Sandra Zwiers*

Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA, Chief Administrative Officer

<b>Appendix</b>	<b>Title</b>
N/A	N/A