

County of Essex/Town of Amherstburg
More Hours, More Patients, More Care
AMO Conference, Aug. 19, 2024

What we are requesting

The County of Essex and the Town of Amherstburg are seeking provincial support to address the lack of weekend and after-hours health care options in a rapidly growing town with an expanding population of seniors that is isolated geographically from hospitals in the urban centres of Windsor and Leamington.


Amherstburg is an outlier in the County of Essex in that it has no urgent-care clinics or walk-in clinics catering to non-rostered patients. The Amherstburg Family Health Team offers a walk-in clinic one day per week and one day on the weekend, but only to rostered patients. The Town's Nurse Practitioner-led clinic, which similarly treats only rostered patients, offers no care past 6 p.m. or on weekends.

Funding for additional physicians for the Amherstburg Family Health Team or funding for additional nurse practitioners to the town's NPLC would enable either facility to dramatically expand the number of patients they serve while also expanding their hours into the evenings and weekends. It would effectively address the issue of care for non-rostered patients by expanding the number of attached patients.

The wholistic suite of services provided by team-based models of care like health teams, nurse practitioner-led clinics and community health centres are proving particularly effective in rural areas like Amherstburg, where seniors and marginalized communities face barriers in accessing care located outside of municipal borders. Residents are voting with their feet. Amherstburg's NPLC has a wait list of 50 that grows by the week and the NPLC in Essex has a waitlist of 133 people.

Provincial investments into successful team-based models of health care like this will yield immediate and appreciable impacts because the infrastructure is already in place and because people are already accessing these services, helping to ensure the province gets the biggest bang for its health care buck.

An annual investment of just \$300,000 to support the placement of one additional physician or two additional nurse practitioners into existing facilities would provide for the rostering of 1,600 additional patients and provide the flexibility for expanded hours during the evening and on the weekend. An investment of \$600,000 would allow for the rostering of 3,200 additional patients and even more flexibility to offer Amherstburg residents quality care when and where they need it most.

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These investments would have a cascading positive impact on the regional health care system as a whole as these expanded services would reduce demand for after-hours care provided in neighbouring municipalities and it would reduce chronic systemic pressures affecting our 911 system. A rising tide lifts all ships and a health care investment in one Essex County municipality benefits them all.

Amherstburg supports the town's NPLC by offering it rental rates below market value in a municipal building and is eager to explore additional opportunities with the province to support the expansion and improvement of regional health care for the residents of Amherstburg and Essex County.


Key Facts

9 to 5 Care: Amherstburg residents experience health care issues around the clock seven days per week but health care services in the municipality are largely limited to daytime hours during the week. None of those services are offered to non-rostered patients, who have no choice but to rely on 911 or travel to clinics outside of their municipality, located at least 30 minutes from hospitals in the urban centres of Leamington or Windsor. This distance is a barrier to care for seniors and marginalized communities, including an influx of new Canadians.

The Amherstburg Family Health Team offers a walk-in clinic one day per week and one day on the weekend but only to rostered patients and the nurse practitioner-led clinic, which also treats only rostered patients, offers no treatment past 6 p.m. or on weekends. The inability of residents to obtain treatment outside of the 9-5 weekday window contributes to poorer patient outcomes as treatment of minor ailments is put off until they become urgent and it contributes to an overreliance on our congested 911 system.

Expanding the number of physicians or nurse practitioners at the Town's existing clinics would enable these facilities to expand their hours while taking on thousands of additional patients who are currently unattached to a primary health care provider. By investing in existing infrastructure and proven, team-based models of care, the Province would be getting the biggest bang for its health care dollar.

Doctor Shortage: A recent study commissioned by the Ontario College of Physicians found 2.3 million residents of the province are without a family doctor. More than 31,000 residents in Windsor-Essex are without a physician and the problem will only get worse with our region expecting to grow more than 10 per cent over the next decade. Nearly fifty per cent of those people live in neighbourhoods with the lowest average incomes. Physician retirements over the next five years may see as many as 100,000 area residents without access to a family doctor.

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These problems are more pronounced in rural areas like Amherstburg lacking medical clinics with evening and weekend hours. While creative solutions like speeding up the accreditation process for foreign-trained doctors in exchange for commitments to practice in rural areas may address the issue, investments in team-based models of care like family health teams or NPLCs, which are proving incredibly successful, would lead to immediate, appreciable improvements.

Growing Demand: The demand for the services provided by family health teams and NPLCs is overwhelming and growing, particularly in predominantly rural communities like Amherstburg and Essex with a growing population of seniors. The NPLC in Amherstburg has a waiting list of 50 that continues to grow by the week. The Essex location has 133 people on a waitlist and the Kingsville location is quickly approaching its capacity limits. These clinics are proving extremely popular not only because of the wholistic suite of services they provide but also because of the lack of alternatives. Patients who are lucky enough to even find a rostered spot have to wait weeks for simple appointments and there is a shortage of accessible urgent and walk-in clinics with evening and weekend hours across the region.

Historic Growth: The Windsor-Essex region added as nearly many people in 2023 as it had in the previous two decades. Our local population skyrocketed by 41,877 people over the past two years compared to the 35,333 people added between 2002 and 2021. That's an astonishing rate of growth only likely to increase as generational investments like the Gordie Howe Bridge, a new hospital and the NextStar Energy Battery Plant ignite an historic surge in commercial, industrial and residential development. The population of Essex County increased by more than 6 per cent from 2016 to 2021 and is expected to increase by as many as 115,000 residents over the next 30 years.

EMS Efficiencies: The lack of access to doctors and clinics with weekend and evening hours has created an unsustainable strain on local health care resources as residents resort to using 911 for non-urgent needs. Windsor-Essex has an extraordinarily high percentage – the highest in Ontario – of patients who arrive by ambulance at emergency rooms, a trend fueled in part by a lacklustre regional transit system our local municipalities are working to improve. The provincial average for June was 19 per cent and the average for each of our three hospitals was 39 per cent, 31 per cent and 22 per cent.

Poor Patient Outcomes: The chronic physician shortage and the lack of clinics with weekend and evening hours creates an environment where residents put off treatment and addressing ailments until they become emergencies. This creates a strain on our paramedic and emergency resources and it leads to poorer patient outcomes. Premature deaths in Windsor-Essex per 1,000 people are 56.3 per cent higher than Ontario, while potential years of lost life are 63.4 per cent higher. Residents here suffer higher incidents of hypertension, hypercholesterolaemia and other dyslipidemia, depression, asthma and acute and other respiratory diseases and disorders.

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Municipal Commitment: County of Essex representatives heeded the message received from our local MPPs after last year’s AMO delegation that it was important for us to work in concert as a region as opposed to individual municipalities when advocating to the provincial government for improved health care. We agree that health care improvements in one municipality have a net benefit for the entire region.


We also agree that municipalities have a role to play in helping the provincial government improve the delivery of health care. Amherstburg offered reduce rental rates to encourage the success of the nurse practitioner-led clinic in its municipality and is preparing to amend its Community Improvement Plan to offer incentives to health care professionals to locate there. The County of Essex and its local municipal partners are likewise prepared to come to the table with resources and creative solutions to support the expansion of team-based primary care, like nurse practitioner-led clinics, family health teams and community health centres.

The Solution

While there is no “silver bullet” which will solve the health care issues affecting our region, provincial investments to expand the number of rostered patients in Amherstburg and the times at which they can seek treatment represent an ideal opportunity to have an immediate and appreciable positive impact.

We know family health teams and NPLCs work because our residents are using them and requesting enhanced access. The growing wait lists are a testament to this. Continued investments in these clinics will alleviate systemic pressures affecting our regional 911 system it will improve patient outcomes.

Essex County’s seven local municipalities are united in the call for more health care resources for our region and will continue working collaboratively with the Windsor-Essex Ontario Health Team and the provincial government to improve the delivery of health care across the region.

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