

# **Our Hospitals, Our Communities**

Report on Hospital Care Surveys in Chatham-Kent

March 20, 2017

Chatham-Kent Health Coalition  
Wallaceburg-WIFN Health Coalition





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# Introduction

In 2016 Ontario Minister of Health, Dr. Eric Hoskins appointed a Supervisor under the Public Hospitals Act to take over the leadership of the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance, which includes the two Chatham hospitals on one site (Public General and St. Joseph's) and the Sydenham District Hospital in Wallaceburg. Since his appointment, Supervisor Rob DeVitt has dismissed the Boards of all three Hospitals, hired a new CEO, and changed the clinical and corporate management. Decisions regarding the future governance, services and the physical infrastructure of the hospitals are expected. These will include whether there will be one Board of Directors and /or whether the local hospital Boards will be elected or appointed, and possible service changes for each site. Ultimately, there will have to be a longer-term plan for the physical sites – including some form of redevelopment for the Wallaceburg site. These decisions will impact the access to vital hospital care for all residents in our region for years – even decades – to come. It is important that these decisions be informed by the experiences and opinions of vital stakeholders in our local public hospitals – the patients, community members and families who rely on our hospitals for their care.

In recent years, the future of the Sydenham site in Wallaceburg has been threatened and services in the Chatham site have been subject to deep cuts. On two separate occasions, the community has generated sufficient opposition to successfully stop the proposed closure of the Sydenham District Hospital in Wallaceburg. Despite the community's best efforts, services have been significantly cut in both the Chatham and Wallaceburg sites. For the Sydenham campus, which was smaller to begin with, the cuts have greatly reduced the scope of services available to local residents, forcing them to travel to Chatham or further afield for care. At the same time, the Chatham hospital has also seen very serious cuts resulting in reduced services for residents.

To date, there has been little opportunity, if any, for residents of the hospitals' catchment areas to give meaningful input into decisions regarding the future of their local hospital services. The Chatham-Kent and Wallaceburg-Walpole Island Health Coalitions, under the umbrella of the Ontario Health Coalition, have been deeply concerned about service cuts and the lack of democratic public input and accountability in our local hospitals.

Ontarians fund our hospitals and expect them to operate as public services, accountable to our communities. As such, we wanted to find a way to gather and provide public input into the decision-making process regarding the future of our local hospitals. To do so, we created surveys that were distributed throughout Chatham and Wallaceburg in November and December 2016. Surveys were collected from doctors' offices, local businesses, places of worship, local radio stations. Both rural and urban areas in Chatham Kent were covered. We also created an online version of the surveys and publicized it through the local media. We asked residents what hospital services they used, where they accessed hospital care in the last three years, whether they had any difficulty accessing care they need, what positive experiences they had and in which hospital(s), and what feedback they would like to relay to the hospital Supervisor and Minister of Health. The complete survey questions are in Appendices I - III. The survey does not pretend to be an academic or scientific study. It was designed to gather from local residents information about their own experiences accessing hospital care in our region.

We were very pleased with the response: 370 completed surveys were collected and analysed. People provided candid and thoughtful input and we are grateful to all of those who took the time to answer the surveys. It is our hope that the input received will help to inform hospital leadership, the government-appointed hospital Supervisor and the Minister of Health about decisions regarding the services and governance of our local hospitals.



# Summary of Survey Results

The vast majority of survey respondents reported that they or a direct family member had accessed hospital care within the last three years. More than 2/3 of those from the Chatham area were able to access that care in their nearest local community. Approximately 1/3 had to travel further for care. Almost half of the respondents from the Wallaceburg area (44%) reported that they had to travel outside of their home community for care.

While Wallaceburg residents reported that they are able to access emergency department care in Wallaceburg, Chatham residents reported that they accessed emergency in Chatham but they also frequently reported accessing emergency departments in Wallaceburg and sometimes in Newbury, due to long wait times in Chatham's emergency department.

Residents from Chatham and area who reported having to travel, most often travelled to London for surgeries, cancer treatment and other specialists' care. Wallaceburg area residents who had to travel most often went to Chatham for diagnostics or inpatient care, followed by travel to Sarnia for surgeries and diagnostics and to London for cancer care.

We asked Chatham residents whether they experienced long waits for hospital care and more than half (52%) reported that they did. Most frequently, these referred to long waits in the emergency department in Chatham, followed by long waits for diagnostic tests and surgeries in Chatham and in other communities (London, Sarnia, Windsor).

When asked to provide details about difficulties accessing care, respondents from the Wallaceburg area named travel as their first difficulty Chatham respondents cited long wait times as their main difficulty.

55% of Wallaceburg respondents and 35% of Chatham respondents reported gaps in services, most commonly citing long waits for emergency department care followed by long waits for diagnostic tests, appointments with specialists and surgeries. Respondents also noted bed and staff shortages in the hospitals and lack of family doctors.

79% of Wallaceburg respondents and 71% of Chatham respondents reported having a good or positive experience accessing hospital care. Many relayed personal stories about high quality and compassionate care. Positive experiences were reported at both of the hospitals in Chatham and Wallaceburg, as well as hospitals in London, Sarnia, Windsor, Strathroy and Newbury.

We asked respondents to give us key messages that they wanted relayed to hospital leadership, the government-appointed hospital Supervisor and the Minister of Health. Overwhelmingly, respondents in both Chatham and Wallaceburg reported that they want the Sydenham District Hospital in Wallaceburg to remain open with its emergency department and services, and respondents also wanted ameliorated services in Wallaceburg. Very frequently, also, respondents wanted more beds and staff and a stop to hospital cuts in Chatham. People asked us to relay their positive experiences receiving care. Several also wanted complaints about high parking costs and excessive executive salaries to be shared.

Overall, the results reveal that most people are able to access care locally, though almost half of Wallaceburg respondents reported having to travel to Chatham or further afield for the care they need. The survey results show that patients are frequently experiencing backlogs and long waits,

particularly in the Chatham emergency department and in access to surgeries and diagnostics both in Chatham and across all of Southwestern Ontario. Interestingly, Chatham residents who had to travel for care reported going to the Wallaceburg and Newbury emergency departments to avoid long waits in Chatham. Travel from Wallaceburg to Chatham was frequently reported as a problem, particularly for elderly people and those who cannot drive themselves. Travel from both communities to other towns for hospital care was also frequently cited as a serious concern for the elderly, non-drivers and people who use wheelchairs. Problems driving to hospitals in Chatham, Windsor, Sarnia and London in the winter due to inclement weather were noted by a number of respondents. In addition to travel and long waits, survey respondents reported staffing and bed shortages as a problem in the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance hospitals. Several reported high parking fees in Chatham as a problem. There exists very strong support for hospital services at both campuses at Chatham Kent Health Alliance and, despite difficulty accessing care either due to distance or long waits, both Chatham and Wallaceburg respondents reported positive experiences once they were able to access that care. There was a deep consensus from across the whole region that the Wallaceburg hospital should remain open, and the vast majority of survey respondents wanted to send a message that services needed to be protected and increased at both hospital sites.



# Complete Survey Results

Here are the complete aggregated survey results:

- Have you or a family member (spouse, parent, child, grandparent, sibling) needed hospital care in the last three years?
- What hospital service did you or your family member require? (eg. emergency department, cancer care, surgeries, diagnostic testing).

**84% of Chatham respondents and 93% of Wallaceburg respondents had either sought hospital care, or had a family member who sought care.** Visits to the emergency department were the most common reason for seeking hospital care, followed by diagnostic testing (including MRI/x-ray/mammography/colonoscopy/endoscopy/ultrasound/knee scope/other), surgeries, and cancer treatment, heart attack, admission to intensive care, palliative care, infections and others.

- Were you able to access this service in Wallaceburg/Chatham? If no, where did you travel to in order to get the service?

**71% of respondents from Chatham were able to access their hospital care in Chatham, while 29% were not able to do so.** Frequently, Chatham residents reported going to Wallaceburg to access the emergency department. Some of these respondents noted that the Chatham emergency department was too busy/had long waits. Other common responses from Chatham residents who travelled to a hospital for care were (in order of frequency): travel to London for cancer care, surgeries, other specialists' care; travel to Windsor for surgeries and diagnostic tests; travel to Newbury for emergency department; travel to Sarnia for inpatient care.

**56% of respondents from Wallaceburg were able to access hospital care in Wallaceburg, while 44% were not able to do so.** Wallaceburg respondents reported that they were able to access the emergency department in Wallaceburg. Those who had to travel, most frequently reported travel to Chatham for diagnostic tests and surgeries. Other services for which respondents reported they had to travel (in order of frequency): Sarnia for surgeries; London for cancer treatment or other specialists' care; Chatham for ICU; Windsor for surgery/diagnostic tests.

- (For Chatham residents only) Did you have a long wait to access this service? If Yes, how long did you wait? Please provide any details you wish to provide.

**52% of Chatham respondents reported long waits to access services.** Chatham respondents who cited long wait times most frequently referred to long waits in the emergency department in Chatham, followed by long waits for diagnostic tests or surgeries in Chatham and in other communities.

- In the last three years have you or a direct family member had difficulty traveling to access needed hospital care in a different town or city?

**When asked if the respondent or a direct family member had difficulty traveling to access needed hospital care in a different town or city, 44% of Wallaceburg respondents and 14% of Chatham respondents stated they did have difficulty.**

Wallaceburg respondents, who more commonly reported travel difficulties, frequently referred to difficulty travelling to Chatham, followed by Sarnia and London. Difficulties were described as: inability to drive, no access to vehicle, inability to access family support, inclement weather, friends not available when needed, expensive parking in Chatham. Other reasons given for difficulty in accessing care in another community: no available admission beds in London, long waits for operating room time.

Chatham respondents who reported difficulty travelling to care cited problems such as: not having transportation, not having family to drive them to London, having to get their family to drive them to London, not having gas money to get to London, having to take time off work to get to London, no available accessible transportation for persons using wheelchairs or for those who have a hard time travelling, difficult/impossible travel in bad weather.

- In the last three years have you or your family member experienced any gaps in hospital service?

**When asked if they or a direct family member experienced any gaps in hospital service, Among Chatham respondents, 35% reported gaps in service while 65% did not. Among Wallaceburg respondents, 55% reported experiencing gaps in service while 36% did not.**

Wallaceburg respondents who reported experiencing gaps in service most frequently reported long waits. Of these respondents, many were reporting long waits in Chatham, but also frequently they reported long waits in Wallaceburg, Sarnia and London. Long waits were reported for emergency department care, specialists, surgeries, diagnostic tests and rehabilitation. Several respondents reported inability to find a family doctor in the community. Several others reported lack of beds or staff shortages in Chatham and Wallaceburg meant that they were sent to another hospital. Several respondents reported family members discharged “too soon” and ended up back in hospital with more serious health issues.

Chatham respondents who reported experiencing gaps in service most frequently reported long waits in the emergency department. Other gaps reported (in order of frequency): long waits for specialists and surgeries; staff shortages and poor morale; no access to family doctor in the community.

- Have you or your family member had a good or positive experience accessing hospital care within the last three years? If Yes, which hospital did you go to? Please describe your experience.

**When asked if they or their family member had a good or positive experience accessing hospital care within the last three years, 79% in Wallaceburg said yes and 29% said no, while in Chatham 71% said yes and 29% said no.**

Positive narratives about care received at both campuses outweighed negative scenarios. Personal stories were shared, including compassionate, caring staff, speedy diagnosis and treatment plans, well-organized care, positive experiences with doctors, nurses, health professionals and other staff. Positive experiences at Chatham-Kent Health Alliance were reported for both sites. Chatham residents that sought emergency department care in Wallaceburg reported fast and good care. Wallaceburg respondents frequently reported quick care. Several respondents from Chatham noted long waits in Chatham but good care. Respondents frequently reported positive experiences with

hospital care in London, Newbury, Sarnia, Windsor, Strathroy, Chatham and Wallaceburg. Negative experiences most frequently reported were long wait times.

- (Chatham residents only) If more hospital services in Wallaceburg were to be closed down and the patients from Wallaceburg, Walpole Island and the surrounding counties were required to access care at the Chatham hospital, do you think that your access to hospital care will improve, worsen or stay the same, and why? Please also share any comments or thoughts about the cuts to services that have occurred in Wallaceburg and Chatham hospitals.

Almost all respondents from Chatham reported that they thought access to hospital care in Chatham would worsen if the Wallaceburg hospital site was to close down.

- Please write any key points you would like us to relay to the hospital CEO, the government-appointed Supervisor of the Chatham Kent Health Alliance, and/or the Minister of Health and his staff.

**The vast majority of people from all over Chatham Kent (98.13%) wanted to be sure that the Wallaceburg campus with an emergency department and increased available services remains open.** This was a key message for virtually all of the Wallaceburg respondents and many of the Chatham respondents.

Reasons for this opinion included:

- Accessibility to local health services, especially emergency department services
- Inability to drive, no available vehicle
- Difficulty driving at night, during inclement weather, difficulty driving with sick children in the vehicle
- Wait times too long in Chatham emergency department
- Emergency department wait times would become longer if Wallaceburg were to close
- Chatham Kent needs the two campuses
- Chatham campus overburdened now

Other key messages included:

- Need to improve wait times in Chatham. This was the second most frequent message respondents wanted relayed.
- Many people documented the need for increased staff at Chatham, noting staff were overburdened. Most frequently people wanted nursing staff increases and a stop to cuts. Respondents also wanted more physicians and other hospital staff.
- Many people wanted to send the message that services must be protected, citing diagnostics, acute care and other services. Some respondents from both Chatham and Wallaceburg areas wanted services restored that had been cut.
- Reduced parking costs or free parking were advocated by several respondents.
- The need for compassionate care for the elderly was a priority message from several respondents.
- Several respondents wanted to relay messages about the high quality of care that they had received.
- Several respondents wanted cuts in high salaries for executives.



# Conclusion

The survey results show that the people of Chatham Kent need their health care requirements to be fulfilled by the two existing campuses that comprise CKHA. From the surveys, we found that there is a high level of support for the local hospitals and people reported positive experiences and a high quality care when they were able to access care. Overwhelmingly, the problems that were reported centred around access-to-care issues: requirements to travel for care and long waits for care. This evidence supports the key messages that the vast majority of the survey respondents wanted relayed to the government and hospital leadership: to keep open, and indeed ameliorate, the services at the Sydenham District Hospital in Wallaceburg, and: to protect and increase the existing services at the Chatham site.

There were questions we could not ask, because we needed to keep the surveys brief. But issues regarding democratic governance by elected and representative hospital boards must be addressed as a public policy issue. It should not be in the power of a single appointed supervisor to eradicate voting rights for entire communities. This issue will need to be addressed soon by the Minister of Health, as his appointed Hospital Supervisor reveals what his plans are for the governance of the CKHA. We also did not get the opportunity in these surveys to consult on a vision for the future of our hospitals. We will be doing this through public hearings later this spring.

Overall, we hope that the process and results of our survey project are supported by the hospital leadership and the Minister of Health. Public hospitals should be accountable to the people of Ontario who fund and rely upon them. Decisions about the future of our local hospital services should be determined based on principles of equity and compassion that underlie our public health care system with the full participation and meaningful input of the communities affected. The unique health care requirements of the population in Chatham Kent present opportunities for CKHA and our provincial government to build a vision for our local hospital care services and programs that will meet the needs of our communities, and which can serve as a model for other regions.

We close with a quote from one of the surveys that we collected:

*“Don’t close hospitals. Health care is a Canadian attribute that we should pride ourselves on. We judge ourselves by how we treat our people, our young, our old and our ill.”*



# Survey, Chatham version

4. Did you have a long wait to access this service?

Yes

No

If Yes, how long did you wait? Please provide any details you wish to provide.

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5. In the last three years have you or a direct family member had difficulty traveling to access needed hospital care in a different town or city?

Yes

No

If YES, please provide any details you wish to provide.

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6. In the last three years have you or your family member experienced any gaps in hospital service? (For example: problems accessing care, long waits for care or going without needed care)

Yes

No

If YES, please explain.

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**7. Have you or your family member had a good or positive experience accessing hospital care within the last three years?**

Yes

No

**If YES, which hospital did you go to? Please describe your experience.**

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**8. If more hospital services in Wallaceburg were to be closed down and the patients from Wallaceburg, Walpole Island and the surrounding counties were required to access care at the Chatham hospital, do you think that your access to hospital care will improve, worsen or stay the same, and why? Please also share any comments or thoughts about the cuts to services that have occurred in Wallaceburg and Chatham hospitals.**

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**9. Please write any key points you would like us to relay to the hospital CEO, the government-appointed Supervisor of the Chatham Kent Health Alliance, and/or the Minister of Health and his staff.**

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## APPENDIX II:

### Survey, Wallaceburg version



#### Wallaceburg – Walpole Island First Nation Health Coalition

519-677-4460

We are a public interest group dedicated to protecting and improving public health care for all under the principles of compassion and equity that underlie in the Canada Health Act.

*The purpose of this survey is to identify our community's needs regarding hospital care. We will use the information in meetings with the hospital CEO, the government-appointed hospital Supervisor and the Minister of Health and his staff. Our goal is to advocate for the health care services our community needs.*

*You do not have to provide any identifying information at all. If you do give us your name and contact information, we will not use identifying information unless you expressly give us permission to do so. You will see there is checkbox for this at the end of the survey.*

*If for any of the questions you have multiple experiences, you can put in one or more of them. Please use the back of the page if you require more space.*

**1. Have you or a family member (spouse, parent, child, grandparent, sibling) needed hospital care in the last three years? Please circle one:**

Yes

No

If NO, please skip to question 6.

**2. What hospital service did you or your family member require? (eg. emergency department, cancer care, surgeries, diagnostic testing).**

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**3. Were you able to access this service in Wallaceburg?**

Yes

No

**If NO, where did you travel to in order to get the service? (For example: Chatham, Samia)**

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**4. In the last three years have you or a direct family member had difficulty traveling to access needed hospital care in a different town or city?**

Yes

No

**If YES, please provide any details you wish to provide.**

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**5. In the last three years have you or your family member experienced any gaps in hospital service? (For example: problems accessing care, long waits for care or going without needed care)**

Yes

No

**If YES, please explain.**

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**6. Have you or your family member had a good or positive experience accessing hospital care within the last three years?**

Yes

No

**If YES, which hospital did you go to? Please describe your experience.**

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7. Please give any key points you would like us to relay to the hospital CEO, the government-appointed Supervisor of the Chatham Kent Health Alliance, and/or the Minister of Health and his staff.

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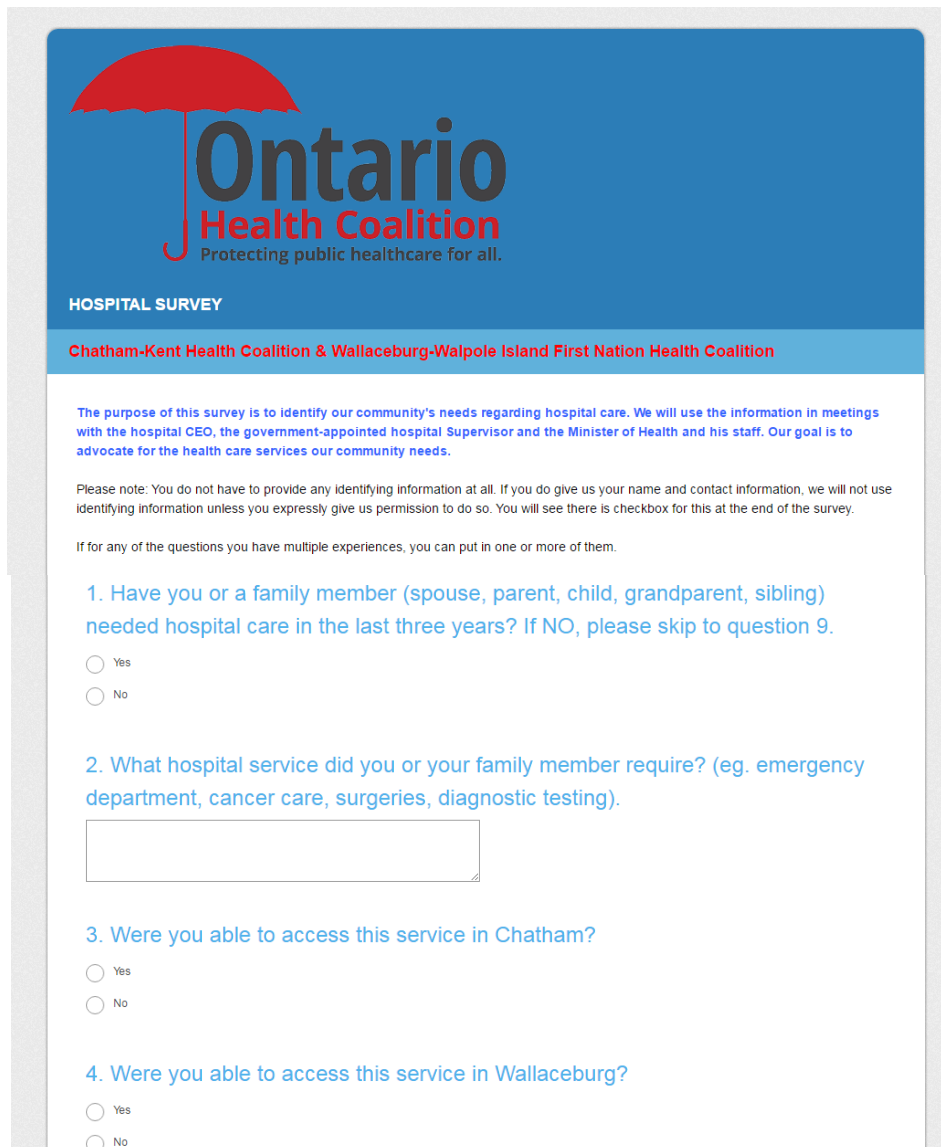
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# APPENDIX III:

## Survey, Online version



The screenshot shows the online version of a survey titled "HOSPITAL SURVEY" by the Ontario Health Coalition. The header features the Ontario Health Coalition logo, which includes a red umbrella icon and the text "Ontario Health Coalition Protecting public healthcare for all." Below the header, the survey title "HOSPITAL SURVEY" is displayed in white on a blue background. The survey is for the "Chatham-Kent Health Coalition & Wallaceburg-Walpole Island First Nation Health Coalition".

The purpose of the survey is to identify community needs regarding hospital care. The information will be used in meetings with the hospital CEO, the government-appointed hospital Supervisor, and the Minister of Health and his staff. The goal is to advocate for health care services that meet community needs.

Please note: You do not have to provide any identifying information at all. If you do give us your name and contact information, we will not use identifying information unless you expressly give us permission to do so. You will see there is a checkbox for this at the end of the survey.

If for any of the questions you have multiple experiences, you can put in one or more of them.

1. Have you or a family member (spouse, parent, child, grandparent, sibling) needed hospital care in the last three years? If NO, please skip to question 9.

☐ Yes  
☐ No

2. What hospital service did you or your family member require? (eg. emergency department, cancer care, surgeries, diagnostic testing).

3. Were you able to access this service in Chatham?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

4. Were you able to access this service in Wallaceburg?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

5. If NO, where did you travel to in order to get the service? (For example: London, Sarnia, Windsor)

6. Did you have a long wait to access this service?

☐ Yes

☐ No

7. If Yes, how long did you wait? Please provide any details you wish to provide.

8. In the last three years have you or a direct family member had difficulty traveling to access needed hospital care in a different town or city?

☐ Yes

☐ No

9. If YES, please provide any details you wish to provide.

10. In the last three years have you or your family member experienced any gaps in hospital service? (For example: problems accessing care, long waits for care or going without needed care)

☐ Yes

☐ No

11. If YES, please explain.

12. Have you or your family member had a good or positive experience accessing hospital care within the last three years?

☐ Yes

☐ No

13. If YES, which hospital did you go to? Please describe your experience.

14. If more hospital services in Wallaceburg were to be closed down and the patients from Wallaceburg, Walpole Island and the surrounding counties were required to access care at the Chatham hospital, do you think that your access to hospital care will improve, worsen or stay the same, and why? Please also share any comments or thoughts about the cuts to services that have occurred in Wallaceburg and Chatham hospitals.

15. Please write any key points you would like us to relay to the hospital CEO, the government-appointed Supervisor of the Chatham Kent Health Alliance, and/or the Minister of Health and his staff.



## APPENDIX IV:

### Municipality of Chatham-Kent Population Demographics

The municipality of Chatham Kent lies in southwestern Ontario. It is within the Erie-St. Clair Local Health Integration Network. Its population currently sits at 102,000. 43,000 people live in the city of Chatham, while the majority of residents live in small towns and rural areas.



To assist readers to have a clear picture of the Municipality of Chatham Kent, specifics about the population of this municipality are listed below.

- There is one city, Chatham, with a population of 43,000 people.
- There is a longstanding farming community.
- There are numerous small rural towns and villages.
- There are 2 First Nations communities (Walpole Island and Moraviantown), as well as Metis communities.
- There is a large migrant population, who are employed to do farm work on a seasonal basis.
- There are small groups of immigrants, and refugees.
- The population is aging (3)
- Unemployment and poverty, both on an acute and chronic basis, are present. (4)
- The population is shrinking. New census data released by Statistics Canada shows the local population dropped by 2% between 2011 and 2016. If the downwards trend continues, the municipality could dip below 100,000 people by the next census in 2021. (Blackburn news, Feb.9, 2017). (2)

Sources:

(1) Population 2016 Census data Statistics Canada Population for Chatham Kent - 102,042, C-K covers 2,471 square km. reference: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/geo/geosearch-georecherche/index-eng.cfm>

(2) <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CMACA&Code1=556&Geo2=PR&Code2=01&Data=Count&SearchText=Chatham-Kent&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&TABID=1&B1=All>

(3) : <https://www.chatham-kent.ca/CKPlan-2035/Documents/PC%20Population%20by%20Age%20Ethnicity%20Indicator%20Nov%202016.pdf>

(4) -K) -- <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a47><http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a>