

April 18, 2016
For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

Breaking News: Success! Patients, Residents Travel 700 kilometres to Ontario Legislature to Save the Wallaceburg Hospital's Emergency Department

Toronto – At a press conference today at Queen's Park, patients and concerned citizens from Wallaceburg issued an urgent plea to Ontario's Minister of Health to stop the closure of the Wallaceburg Hospital's Emergency Department. The residents, who are traveling more than 700 kilometres across the province and back to bring their message to Ontario's Legislature, told their stories of how the Wallaceburg emergency department has saved the lives of their family members and friends. Their local MPP Monte McNaughton greeted them in the Legislature, wrote a letter to the Health Minister advocating to keep the Emergency Department open and delivered hundreds of personal letters from community members to the Premier today.

The Sydenham District Hospital in Wallaceburg has been devastated by cuts in recent years. Patients are forced to travel to Chatham's overcrowded and overstretched hospital for more and more of their care. But in neighbouring Chatham also, the hospital has undergone major cuts. Chatham is often sending their overflow to Wallaceburg.

With the closure of the Wallaceburg Emergency Department, local capacity to provide needed care to the community would be severely compromised. More than 20,000 residents serviced by the Wallaceburg Hospital would lose access to vital health care services, putting the lives and well-being of those living in the region at risk.

In response to questions raised by NDP Health Critic France Gelinas in the Legislature this morning, the Premier and Health Minister stated that the proposed closure is a "rumour". In fact, the proposed Emergency Department closure is far more than a rumour. Chatham-Kent Health Alliance hospital CEO recently told the media, in response to questions about the closure of the Emergency Department, that "everything is on the table" and that he was making a proposal to the LHIN to change these services. There is no question that there is a proposal in the works to close the Emergency Department.

That said, we are thrilled that the Health Minister and Premier indicated in the Legislature that there is no intention on their part to close the Emergency Department. We are pleased that the Minister made his message to the local hospital leadership very clear. We look forward to working with the government to ensure that their commitment today is followed through. We will be holding both the local leadership and the government accountable for this promise.

"We have travelled hundreds of kilometers today to bring our appeal to our government to save our local hospital," said Shirley Roebuck, chair of the Wallaceburg Health Coalition. "Our local residents have come to the Ontario Legislature to tell their stories about how our local emergency department has saved the lives of their family members. The hospital services under threat of cuts and closure in Wallaceburg and across Ontario are vital services that make the difference between life and death. There is no higher priority issue for our community right now, other than to save our hospital. We are pleased that the government has heard us, and we will insist that the local hospital leadership follows through on the Premier's and Health Minister's commitments today to keep open our Emergency Department."

"The closure of an Emergency Department is tantamount to the closure of the hospital: the hospital "H" would need to come down, and those living in the region would lose access to local emergency care," noted Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. "It is beyond time that the hospital cuts stop and communities no longer be thrown into crisis trying to save life-saving and vital care for their home towns. We are thrilled that the government is committed to saving Wallaceburg's emergency services. We hope that the government will improve hospital funding across Ontario to at least the national average, and stop the cuts."

For more information: contact Shirley Roebuck, chair, Wallaceburg Health Coalition, 226-402-2724 or Natalie Mehra, executive director, Ontario Health Coalition, 416-441-2502.