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Attn: Assignment Editor

For Immediate Release

Welland Hospital Plan Unveiled: Precarious Services are No Replacement for Hospital Closure, Coalition Warns

Welland/Niagara/Toronto: The Niagara Health System (NHS) revealed a sliver of its hospital plans today. In its email to the media, the hospital outlined its new proposal for an ambulatory care centre (outpatient clinics), an “urgent care” centre (walk-in clinic) and long-term care beds to be located in Welland.

The timing of the revelation is interesting. On Monday, Welland residents head to Queen’s Park to hold a Welland Hospital Awareness Day. Residents will raise the planned closure of Welland’s hospital in a media conference at the Main Legislative Building and will meet with MPPs and other officials at the Ontario Legislature to advocate for the hospital to be saved and the cuts stopped.

The currently approved government plan is that all inpatient hospital services and the emergency department will be closed down in Welland along with the closure of four other entire hospitals in Niagara, to be replaced by one hospital near Niagara Falls. The new proposal would replace Welland’s community hospital a set of outpatient services and nursing home beds. Either way, Welland and area patients with serious and life-threatening health emergencies would not be able to receive care locally and would have to travel to a community that has an emergency department to access care. If patients go to an urgent care centre needing emergency care, clinic staff call an ambulance to take the patients to an actual hospital. The hours of operation for urgent care centres can be cut at any time. All patients requiring inpatient care would also have to travel to another community.

The Ontario Health Coalition has seen the same types of promises made before. In each case, the government told the communities involved that they would provide ambulatory care facilities and promised to maintain services in local hospital sites, but these promises have subsequently been abandoned, or services have been subsequently cut, or services opened and then entirely closed down within a few years.

Further, the services proposed for the ambulatory care centre that would replace the Welland Hospital are services that have the most precarious future. Kathleen Wynne’s government is systematically dismantling the community hospital system across Ontario and has repeatedly released plans to cut, close and privatize outpatient clinics, diagnostics and day surgeries. Thus, the plan for Welland, even if it were actually happen, would leave the community with services that the government already plans to close down.

The Health Coalition is working with hundreds of local residents to fight the closure of the Welland Hospital and the fight back campaign will continue and escalate. The closure of the Welland Hospital will worsen access to vital health care for the 100,000 people it serves. The decision to close the hospital must be rescinded and services restored.

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