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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

## **Welland Hospital Awareness Day at Ontario Legislature: Patients, Residents Demand Plan to Close Welland Hospital Be Stopped**

Toronto – At a press conference today at Queen’s Park, patients and concerned citizens from Welland issued an urgent plea to Ontario’s Minister of Health to overturn the decision to close the Welland Hospital, telling him that more than 100,000 people served by the Welland Hospital will suffer worse access to vital health services if the Welland Hospital is closed. The group has been working tirelessly to save the Welland hospital from closure and has collected more than 14,000 signatures on a petition that will be presented this afternoon in the Legislature, by Cindy Forster, Member of Provincial Parliament for Welland.

Currently, there is a plan to close five entire community hospitals in the Niagara region, including the Welland Hospital. The closure of a hospital serving 100,000 people is almost unheard of in Canada. All patients would be forced to travel to other communities for acute care, inpatient services and emergency department services.

Last year, Dr. John Lister, an international health policy expert from Coventry University conducted an analysis of the plan, and warned that closing five hospitals in Niagara not only risks patient safety, but also that the closure plan, proposed by Niagara Health System CEO Kevin Smith, lacks any rational justification and contains glaring omissions. The proposal and planning documents used by the government-appointed LHIN to approve the motion to close five of Niagara’s community hospitals contained no analysis of population need for care nor transportation.

Already, the Niagara Health System’s occupancy levels for acute care routinely exceed 100%, placing the NHS among the most overcrowded hospitals in Ontario. Moreover, Niagara has the second highest number of seniors but the second lowest number of long-term care beds per population, according to LHIN documents. The seniors population will be particularly hard-hit by the closure of the Welland Hospital.

“Having a local community hospital is not like a mall, where you have the luxury to shop around. When you have an emergency, or you need care, often you need it quickly,” said Henry Miron, a Welland resident who uses the health care system. “If that care is not in your own town, it can be a matter of life and death. We shouldn’t have to run around the Niagara peninsula for care, it should be provided in our own community.”

“Our region is being suffocated by hospital cuts and closures, the worst in all of Ontario. No argument out of the Ministry of Health could possibly justify the plan to close five entire community hospitals and replace them with one,” said Sue Hotte, co-chair of the Niagara Health Coalition. “Not only is this plan not grounded in evidence, it is dangerous, especially in a community so heavily populated by seniors.”

“Across Ontario, we are seeing the devastating impact of hospital cuts in communities large and small. Ontario is now in the ninth consecutive year of hospital cuts, as the Wynne government systematically dismantles the public community hospital system,” said Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “What we are seeing in Niagara is among the very worst. It’s time the Ministry of Health realized that the plan to close the Welland hospital must be stopped and services restored.”

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