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**For Immediate Release**

**Attn: Assignment Editor**

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Residents Plan to Step Up Pressure to Ask MPP Fedeli to Save the North Bay Hospital's Residential Addictions Treatment Program**

North Bay – About 40 people attended a public meeting last night to plan next steps to save the North Bay hospital's residential addictions treatment program and committed to ratcheting up the pressure to ask MPP the Honourable Vic Fedeli to step in and stop the closure. The next step will be a rally on Saturday April 4, and many people at the public meeting committed to help organize to make it a big event.

The Ontario Health Coalition has been working with local residents concerned about this planned closure of more than half of the existing residential addictions treatment beds in North Bay. There is a waitlist for the programs both at the North Bay hospital and at the North Bay Recovery Home and there is nowhere else for people in need of residential treatment to go. The nearest program is in Sudbury, an hour-and-a-half away and it has a wait list.

Both community-based and hospital-based health care services have been subject to years of cuts, funding freezes and curtailments, Ontario Health Coalition executive director Natalie Mehra reported, saying, "We support the community-based withdrawal management programs that the community agencies advocated for as a vital part of the continuum of care. Those services should be expanded, and there seems to be a total consensus about this. Our concern is that the residential treatment programs cannot be replaced by withdrawal management, which is detox and support programs, not residential programs, and there is also a very deep consensus in this community that these vital services should not be closed down." Her question – "Where are the people in need of this care supposed to go?" was echoed over and over by participants in the meeting.

Speakers at the meeting reviewed what has happened to date, leading up to the apparent decision to close the 29 residential treatment beds and discussed the situation in North Bay.

Ms. Mehra read from a letter sent to MPP Vic Fedeli by Barbara Groves (with her permission) as follows:

"I am a grandparent of a wonderful young man with mental illness and has strayed into the drug scene which is presently prevalent in our region. The waiting list to provide the urgent medical need and support for these residents of our community is disgraceful. I am pleading with you to keep the existing spaces for care open; this is imperative! If this proposed closure becomes a reality it will be devastating to many people in the Nipissing District who require residential treatment for their addictions. When it hits close to home I have become aware of the urgent need for this facility to remain open. As you know I represented my municipality of Chisholm for 15 years, the last 7 as Mayor, and during that time we worked together on projects to improve our municipalities. I know we both worked diligently for the betterment of our constituents and I plead with you to support this exceptional cause."

Virtually everyone at the meeting who has not already sent a letter to MPP Vic Fedeli asking him to stop the closure of the 29 residential addiction treatment beds, held up their hands volunteering to do so within the next week. The Coalition is asking everyone who cares about this issue to send off even a short letter to MPP Fedeli ([vic.fedeli@pc.ola.org](mailto:vic.fedeli@pc.ola.org)).



Miles Peters, an advocate for homeless people said, “North Bay is the centre of the drug culture in the northeast. I have seen a lot of deaths from overdose and suicide. I’ve seen a lot of successes too, in recovery. We need a comprehensive plan to help, including saving the beds.” He joined the Health Coalition in advocating that advocates and users of the services be included in planning what is needed, along with the front-line staff, not just the executives of community agencies and the hospital.

John McIsaac, also an advocate for the homeless who makes igloos for people to sleep in, spoke on the panel and added his moving account about the need for the full continuum of care and social services to support people in need, decrying the lack of resources and attention that are being given.

Doug Allan, a research officer at the Canadian Union of Public Employees reported that Ontario has cut more hospital beds than any other province in Canada and Ontario’s hospital funding has dropped to the bottom of the country. The North Bay plan to cut beds is part of an overall trend of cutting hospitals despite real need for care. He spoke against the process that has pitted community organizations against hospital services in competition for too few dollars to provide for community need, and advocated for the full continuum of care to be created for North Bay. “We can afford it,” he said, noting that the Ford government has underspent on health care and there are tens of billions of dollars in tax giveaways and subsidies that the government has not even given a second thought to, while people seeking help to recover from addictions are being short-shrifted. In their third quarter financial report, the Ford government quietly increased spending by \$1.5 billion but none for health care and health care is going to be underspent by \$400 million, according to Ontario’s Financial Accountability Office, he said.