

Introducing the Made-in-Muskoka Healthcare System of the Future

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As hospital redevelopment continues to evolve, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC) is sharing the details of the proposed Made-in-Muskoka Healthcare system, a different model of care for the future that positions Muskoka's new hospitals to enhance the quality of local healthcare and bring new services to the area and beyond the walls of the hospitals.

The new innovative model has resulted from months of in-depth and inclusive planning efforts with team members including staff, physicians and midwives, volunteers, patients and family members and key healthcare partners to explore ways to create a sustainable, affordable and quality-focused approach to service delivery in two new hospitals in Bracebridge and Huntsville.

"Patients we serve across all of our communities are very important to us, and so is the outstanding team of providers and support staff that are our legacy of exceptional care," says President & CEO Cheryl Harrison. "Our planning has been thoughtful to respond to the challenges we are facing. These include ongoing healthcare worker shortages since the pandemic, operational challenges with small volume programs and services, and a prescribed budget for building the two new hospitals."

The Made-in-Muskoka Healthcare system is a creative and more efficient solution to build two specialized hospitals that are complementary to each other rather than identical. Each hospital will include full-service Emergency Departments and inpatient beds, but with less duplication of services in the region. Enhanced community outreach will provide new services closer to home in outlying communities like Almaguin Highlands and Gravenhurst through expanded

partnerships with community health agencies including Family Health Teams and Health Hubs.

“We recognize this is proposing a different structure from the status quo in Muskoka for the past 50-plus years,” says Harrison. “We are in a very changed environment since the pandemic with a chronic shortage in healthcare workers that causes repeated service disruptions where we have to single site services when we can’t ensure safe medical coverage. Staggering post-pandemic inflation has driven a 50% increase in healthcare construction costs, and this means that collectively we cannot afford to build our facilities exactly how they are today. Solving these challenges for decades to come has taken creative thinking to find a way to provide the same services, but differently and more efficiently. Our goal is to develop a healthcare delivery model that is realistic, affordable, and ensures the long-term sustainability of our hospitals and high-quality care. Our focus has been on the needs of the populations that we serve. This means to keep services here, we need to think differently from how things have been done in the past.”

The Made-in-Muskoka Healthcare model concentrates day surgeries and other outpatient surgical procedures, as well most outpatient exams such as non-urgent imaging, within a leading edge Ambulatory & Surgical Centre on a new location in Bracebridge. The 24-7 Emergency Department activity would be supported by full diagnostics and medical specialist support, 14 inpatient beds in single patient rooms for short-stay admissions, and four Intensive Care Unit beds. The model envisions surgical expansion, including orthopedic joint replacements in the future, closer to home.

Inpatient care including obstetrical labour and delivery is concentrated in Huntsville with 139 beds for acute care for longer stays, the addition of specialized rehabilitation care to help patients recover from stroke locally, and new reactivation care to ensure patients leaving hospital are equipped to transition home successfully. As well, a higher level Intensive Care Unit growing to 10 beds will keep more advanced, critical care patients in Muskoka. Just like in Bracebridge, the 24-7 Emergency Department also has access to surgery and full diagnostics. Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) services for the entire region are also included.

“We believe that this new approach will meet the needs of the populations that we serve, and that it will be more sustainable and affordable than our current approach,” adds Harrison. “It will improve provider experience and ensure our team members can work to the top of their scope and skillset, and allows us to explore new service areas that would not have been possible otherwise.”

The future-focused model will benefit from continued advancements in medicine and virtual technology, and new hospitals that are built green and are flexible in design. A robust and safe transportation system would be developed between the two sites to ensure seamless patient care, while also supporting the travel needs of families and staff.

“There are different reactions as we socialize a new model for the future,” says Harrison. “We are keen to listen and work together to develop the best model for the future that meets the needs of our communities, leverages a significant opportunity to build new hospitals, and gives the best care locally for future generations.”

Community members are encouraged to learn more about how this new model will create a stronger healthcare system at upcoming [community chats](/en/about-mahc/Stay-Connected.aspx) taking place across the region, both in person and virtually, from January 29 to February 7, 2024. Please visit www.mahc.ca/communitychats for more information and to register to attend a virtual chat via Zoom.

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