

# 2022-23 ANNUAL REPORT



ÉQUIPE SANTÉ ONTARIO  
**NIAGARA**  
ONTARIO HEALTH TEAM



## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The NOHT-ÉSON recognizes the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg. This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties, is within the lands protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum agreement, and is directly adjacent to the Haldimand Treaty territory. Today, this land continues to be the home of many Indigenous Peoples.

Acknowledging ensures we reflect on our past and what changes can be made going forward to further the reconciliation process, and it reminds us that the great standard of living that we enjoy in Niagara is directly related to the resources and friendships of the Indigenous People who make up this community.

*Landscape of Nations Memorial, Queenston Heights Park, Niagara-on-the-Lake*

# MESSAGE FROM THE PLANNING TABLE CO-LEADS

We are pleased to present you the successes of the NOHT-ÉSON for the 2022-2023 fiscal year. As a Cohort 1 OHT, 2022-2023 marked the NOHT-ÉSON's third full year since the Ministry of Health announced the first wave of OHTs in late 2019.

With a goal to improve population health outcomes, partners from across the continuum of care have come together over the past three years to understand and implement opportunities to transform the health care system in Niagara. Under a consensus decision-making model, over 45 partner organizations and a number of patient/client/family/caregiver (PCFC) representatives have been working diligently to improve the way we operate as a connected system, considering all legs of a patient's journey, as we seek to make it easier, and more equitable for those seeking care in Niagara.

We have encountered many challenges over the past few years, namely the pandemic and unprecedented health

human resource shortages, but our commitment to improving care in Niagara has never wavered, and we will continue to collaborate as a system to ensure that people in Niagara have timely and equitable access to the best care.

Highlighting our successes and accomplishments over the past year, this report contains examples of how the NOHT-ÉSON is endeavouring to transform the system, one piece at a time. We are also in the process of finalizing our very first strategic plan, which we aim to launch over the coming months. With a focus on system integration, access to primary care, health equity, health human resources, and accountability, the plan will guide the NOHT-ÉSON over the next five years.

We are grateful for the dedication and hard work of the various partners of the NOHT-ÉSON that work tirelessly to improve the quality of care in Niagara, going beyond the call to action. Thank you for your commitment to the NOHT-ÉSON's vision, and we look forward to the year ahead.



**CAROL NAGY**

Co-Lead  
Planning Table



**DAVID CEGLIE**

Co-Lead  
Planning Table



**LINDA BOICH**

Past Co-Lead  
Planning Table



**FRANK RUBERTO**

Alternate Co-Lead  
Planning Table



**SABRINA PILUSO**

Director, Planning  
NOHT-ÉSON

## WHO WE ARE

The NOHT-ÉSON is a partnership of the Niagara region's health care providers organized under the Province's Ontario Health Teams initiative.

Together, NOHT-ÉSON members are working to create an inclusive, efficient health care system that integrates and streamlines the delivery of health care services, making it easier for Niagara residents to access the care they need and improving the overall experience and health outcomes for Niagara residents.

Our membership is comprised of nearly every type of health care organization in the region, including academic institutions, acute and rehabilitation hospitals, complex care providers, community health centres, community support organizations, Indigenous health and social service providers, mental health and addiction service providers, primary care providers, French-language support organizations, public health, emergency medical services, and seniors services. The membership is also comprised of PCFC representatives who ensure the perspectives of people with lived experience accessing health and social services in the Niagara region are included.

In addition to improving the health of Niagara residents, the NOHT-ÉSON serves as a platform to advance the institutional knowledge of its members, maintain effective communications with the public, and provide health care organizations with

a unified voice to address health concerns facing residents of the Niagara region.

## VISION

Healthy together. Exceptional, connected care, now and for future generations.

## MISSION

To work as one coordinated team to provide service, support, and care, no matter when or where you need it.

## VALUES

**Respect:** We honour the feelings, wishes, rights, and traditions of all. We are driven by empathy and are committed to providing culturally safe and appropriate care.

**Equity:** We are committed to reducing barriers to access and achieving inclusive health care for all.

**Integrity:** We will conduct ourselves consistently with honesty and make ethical decisions that are worthy of trust.

**Accountability:** We are responsible for our actions, behaviours, performance, and decisions.

**Engagement:** We will inform, include, and partner with our interested and affected parties in health and community social service planning and decision-making.

## PLANNING TABLE AND WORKING GROUPS

The Planning Table is the principal decision-making body for the NOHT-ÉSON, and each partner organization provides a representative. Decisions are made by consensus, and every representative has a voice at the table. Issues are rigorously and openly discussed until a decision is reached that is supported by everyone. The various working groups and ad hoc committees also use the consensus decision-making model.

The various working groups carry out tasks and make recommendations to the Planning Table. Decisions made at the Planning Table are measured against the organization's mission, vision, and values, the mandate of the organization as given by Ontario's Ministry of Health, and the health benefits generated for patients, clients, families, and caregivers in Niagara.

The number of PCFC representatives at the Planning Table increased from three to seven in 2023. Adding four PCFC representatives increases the perspectives of people with lived experience who have accessed health and social services in the Niagara region. They also participate in the NOHT-ÉSON's various working groups.

## STAFF TEAM

In 2022, the NOHT-ÉSON established its first project management office comprised of various human resources to carry out day-to-day tasks in alignment with the organization's mission and vision. The Planning Table deliberated on a number of recommended positions, and the complement for 2022-2023 was as follows:

- Director of Planning
- Executive Assistant
- Manager, Communications and Engagement
- Engagement Specialist
- Senior Human Resources Advisor
- Project Manager, Population Health
- Project Manager, Mental Health and Addictions
- Project Manager, Information Technology
- Project Manager, 24/7 Navigation
- Business System Analysts (2)
- Manager, Indigenous Health Care Relations
- Finance Manager

The team includes a mix of contracts, secondments, and purchase of service arrangements, full-time and part-time positions, some of which were project-specific roles that have since come to an end. This list does not include the countless organizations and individuals who have so generously donated additional human resources and precious time to support the work of the NOHT-ÉSON. Thank you to those who provide the behind-the-scenes assistance to the NOHT-ÉSON!

## OUR PRIORITIES

Each year, the NOHT-ÉSON determines health care priorities for the Niagara region. When selecting priorities, the NOHT-ÉSON uses a wealth of data collected from organizations throughout the region and the unique insights of its membership. With this information, we identify opportunities to improve care and create the most positive health outcomes for Niagara residents now and in the future.

The NOHT-ÉSON has identified priority populations:

- People requiring stroke care;
- People who would benefit from a palliative approach to care;
- Children and youth experiencing mental health and addiction issues;
- Adults experiencing mental health and addiction issues; and
- People living with dementia.

Ensuring equitable access to culturally safe care is of utmost importance, and the NOHT-ÉSON has committed to improving access to and experience with the health care system for Indigenous Peoples and Francophone populations.

## HOW WE MEASURE SUCCESS

The NOHT-ÉSON is in the early stages of transforming health care and social service delivery across Niagara. At its maturity, changes will include:

- A fully coordinated range of care and services;
- 24/7 access to system navigation services and seamless transitions through a person's health care journey; and
- Improved access to secure digital tools, online health records, and virtual care options.

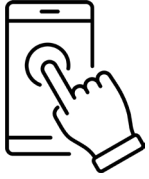
These changes will ultimately lead to:

- Better health outcomes for the people of Niagara; and
- Improved health care and social service interactions and experiences for patients, clients, families, and caregivers.

The NOHT-ÉSON has developed and implemented activities and resources to enhance access and improve health care and social services outcomes in the Niagara region.

The following pages include many examples of initiatives that were undertaken over the 2022/23 fiscal year.





## DIGITAL NAVIGATION

The NOHT-ÉSON established a project team to design and implement ***an online support tool to assist the public in finding health and social services in Niagara that meet their needs.***

Between October 2022 and March 2023, the team engaged with patients, clients, families, caregivers, and clinicians to understand the gaps and solutions to the gaps in accessing health care and social services.

Based on the feedback received, the project team ***developed and launched the Resource Navigator*** in March 2023, an online navigation tool with regional and provincial health and social service resources useful to Niagara residents and professionals in the health and social service sectors.

The resources are prioritized to help users understand which services and organizations can address people's specific needs, such as where to find a doctor or nurse practitioner or how to access services related to mental health and addictions.

The Resource Navigator was also translated into French, and there is a section dedicated to French language health and community services that lists organizations in Niagara that deliver services in French.

Between its initial launch on March 2 and May 31, 2023, more than 2,000 people visited the webpage. The most frequented areas were related to finding a family doctor or nurse practitioner, home health and community support, older adult care services, urgent and/or crisis support, and resources on mental health and addictions.







## SCOPE NIAGARA

Seamless Care Optimizing the Patient Experience (SCOPE Niagara) connects family physicians and nurse practitioners with a nurse navigator, who directs them to the most appropriate specialist at Niagara Health, **providing real-time support for complex and urgent patients.**

From May 2022 to March 2023, 122 primary care providers registered for the program, and 319 service requests resulted in **an emergency department avoidance rate of 82%.**

As of May 2023, there were nearly 500 calls to SCOPE Niagara. The requests for support included general internal medicine, diagnostic imaging, and kidney care. Opportunities to expand the program are being explored, including orthopedic services, mental health, and addictions.



## VIRTUAL URGENT CARE

The NOHT-ÉSON has partnered with Niagara Health to offer virtual urgent care (VUC). The service is available to adults with a non-pressing medical issue or health concern that is not life-threatening. Still, they require medical assistance and do not have access to a primary care provider. Niagara residents can book an appointment online to speak with a health professional from Niagara Health from their homes.

From April 2022 to March 2023, there were 1,902 visits through the VUC platform. Follow-up surveys showed that 88% of patients were satisfied or very satisfied with the service, and 51% of survey respondents shared that VUC helped them to **avoid visiting the emergency department.**



## ONLINE APPOINTMENT BOOKING

Since December 2022, the NOHT-ÉSON has assisted family health teams, community health centres, and other primary care sites with implementing online appointment booking (OAB). Enabling patients to book in-person, video, or telephone appointments using an electronic device, such as a mobile phone, tablet, or personal computer, OAB is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Users choose a date and time for their appointment that is convenient for them. They then receive an automated appointment confirmation.

By the end of March 2023, **69 family health care practitioners in Niagara offered their patients the ability to book appointments online**. A multi-faceted strategy created greater awareness among primary care settings across Niagara. The NOHT-ÉSON wishes to thank the eHealth Centre of Excellence for collaborating on this initiative.



## CANCER SCREENING

The NOHT-ÉSON continues collaborating with the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Regional Cancer Program to encourage people to **prioritize cancer screening**. The COVID-19 pandemic created a significant screening backlog in Hamilton, Niagara, Haldimand and Brant regions; approximately 31,000 residents were overdue for breast screening, and 47,000 were overdue for cervical screening.

Several initiatives took place in 2023, including creating **a cancer screening brochure** that highlighted the benefits of cancer screening and different screening options. **Community Wellness Days** took place in Fort Erie and St. Catharines, with the mobile cancer screening coach onsite at each location. **Mobile cancer screening** was also offered to newcomers in Niagara Falls who are temporarily housed in area hotels and who do not have access to a primary care provider.



## PALLIATIVE CARE

The Palliative Care Working Group (PCWG) is developing and implementing several projects to **increase access to palliative care and bereavement supports for Niagara residents, including Indigenous Peoples and Francophones**, two priority populations of the NOHT-ÉSON.

The working group is engaged in exploring individualized, person-centred palliative care for Indigenous Peoples. It is recognized that providing kind, compassionate care with understanding and respect relieves a person's pain and symptoms. This approach to care also honours a person's spiritual beliefs, traditions, and customs and cares for the whole person while supporting their entire family and community. Indigenous-informed care can also improve people's experiences with palliative care providers.

The PCWG has sought Indigenous advisor input as part of its subcommittee. The working group is also developing an Indigenous-informed Palliative Care Framework for Niagara, and it continues to share allyship training and resources with partner organizations.

As it enables Francophones to seek assistance, explain their experiences and conditions, and express their needs and preferences in their language, the PCWG is committed to ensuring that French-language palliative care services are provided in the region.

The PCWG promotes Active Offer training for palliative care health care providers and organizations. It is also building the infrastructure for a French-speaking palliative care physician to join the Palliative Care Outreach Team.

Further, early identification of palliative care needs often contributes to positive patient, family, and system outcomes. The PCWG is providing Learning Essentials for Palliative Care (LEAP) and Serious Illness Conversations training to hospital staff and health care providers in the community. It is also engaged in a palliative care remote care monitoring pilot project.

Bereavement support is also essential in palliative care, particularly among children and youth. The health and well-being of young people are improved when they receive bereavement support following a death in their relationship circle. The PCWG is developing pathways to integrate bereavement programs within the children and youth mental health and educational systems.



## DEMENTIA CARE

Niagara residents are experiencing significant wait times for admission into the Geriatric Assessment Program (GAP) and the Geriatric Rapid Assessment Clinic; there is a 400-day waitlist to participate in the Specialized Geriatric Assessment Program.

As a result, the NOHT-ÉSON's Dementia Care Working Group (DCWG) explored ways to **reduce wait times for timely access** to cognitive assessments while identifying other community supports that can serve this population.

Timely cognitive assessments are critical because earlier detection and diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia will result in being connected to support, education and community resources that have been shown to delay admission to long-term care and improve client outcomes.

In February 2023, the DCWG hosted focus groups with people living with dementia and caregivers to better understand the enablers and barriers to accessing support from medical teams, specialized programs, and the community. Virtual town halls with Niagara practitioners took place throughout the spring to find

solutions to increase capacity, discuss the tools and resources practitioners require, and minimize referrals to specialized geriatric services that would be better served elsewhere.

An inventory of referral criteria for cognitive assessments with wait times was completed in June 2023.

An in-person physician workshop endorsed and funded by DCWG has resulted in a report being written by a Research and Scholarship Director from the Michael G. DeGroote School of Medicine. The report recommends the development of a Niagara Family Physician Dementia Community of Practice and an investment in geriatric training opportunities for frontline workers across the sectors.

A report submitted to Ontario Health where DCWG recommended a Niagara-specific centralized intake for specialized geriatric services has resulted in the Regional Geriatric Program (RGP) Central Intake inviting relevant players together to further discuss such a process.

Several new partnerships and initiatives were also undertaken:

The Niagara Medical Group Family Health Team and Portage Medical



## MEASURING HEALTH EQUITY PROJECT

Family Health Team began accepting patients to their respective memory clinics who were outside their rosters. The Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara also submitted a bilingual proposal for a community memory clinic.

The Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region was included in a proposal to have staff perform cognitive testing on behalf of family physicians; the Niagara Medical Group Family Health Team would interpret testing results.

Niagara Health is providing data specific to dementia cases that is driving the work of the DCWG.

A directory of community services available to people living with dementia and their care partners will be printed in the fall and made available at doctor's offices.

The NOHT-ÉSON has begun creating a list of standardized patient/client sociodemographic questions to be used by service providers to establish baseline information on what, when, where services are being utilized, and by whom.

At a system level, the data collected could identify high-needs populations and gaps in services. It could help to plan, implement solutions, monitor results and impacts of policy changes, share best practices, and scale successful local innovations to improve health equity.

Once the standard and procedures for the collection of health equity data are established, the NOHT-ÉSON and its partner organizations will be able to interpret the data collected to ***understand better who they serve, track treatment and outcomes for patients and clients, customize care at the bedside/clinical level, develop organization-specific analyses, and monitor the impact of program changes.***

A number of questions were identified and will be brought to the Planning Table for endorsement. The group measuring health equity intends to develop an implementation and change management plan, and identify volunteer pilot sites for its rollout.



## LET'S GO HOME



Multiple community support providers, Niagara Health, Home and Community Care Support Services of Niagara, and the NOHT-ÉSON came together in the summer of 2022 to establish Let's Go Home (LEGHO).

The program **helps seniors transition home from the emergency department by connecting them with community supports**, such as meal services, transportation, homemaking, and respite care. LEGHO also aims to decrease the number of hospital admissions in people 65 years of age or older with non-acute or non-medical concerns, and/or who are living with dementia.

Approximately 275 people who match the above criteria visit emergency departments in Niagara every year with non-urgent or non-clinical issues.

Launched in late January 2023, the program's LEGHO First Link Care Navigators work with hospital discharge staff at Niagara Health's emergency departments in Welland, St. Catharines, and Niagara Falls to identify eligible patients and their families. The navigators connect patients to community supports, dementia-specific services, and respite care.

Niagara received \$500,000 in base funding from Ontario Health West for the program, led by Community Support Services of Niagara. Services are time-limited and free for up to six consecutive weeks, with the option to access LEGHO a second time in a given year.

As of March 31, 2023, 41 people were referred to the program, and 28 met the eligibility criteria. Over that time, 23 homemaking visits were made, 461 hot and cold meals were provided, three rides for follow-up appointments were made, 92 wellness checks took place, and 50 hours of respite were provided.

As with similar programs in the province, referrals to LEGHO have grown steadily since its rollout. The NOHT-ÉSON anticipates approximately 300 people will be referred to the program by year's end.



## REMOTE CARE MONITORING

Niagara residents can now receive remote health care services through various **digital health solutions to age in place or recover at home**. Enabled by technology and an integrated care team, remote care monitoring (RCM) is a form of virtual care that supports individuals with certain health care needs. The NOHT-ÉSON implemented four RCM focus areas in the 2022/23 fiscal year: COVID-19, palliative care, surgery, and diabetes management.



## UTI AWARENESS

The Home and Community Care Working Group sought to **decrease the number of hospital patients with an alternate level of care (ALC) designation**. The term refers to patients occupying a hospital bed but not requiring the intensity of services provided in that care setting. The working group reviewed hospital data and discovered that 90% of people with an ALC designation were admitted to the hospital through the emergency department (ED), a significant portion of which have documented dementia, and many of whom visited an ED with a urinary tract infection (UTI) or related issues.

The working group created and shared clinical and general resources to increase UTI awareness. The campaign focused on how UTIs present in people living with dementia, how they and their caregivers can detect early signs and symptoms, and alternative care options.

Presentations were made to long-term care and retirement homes in Niagara, along with education sessions with Home and Community Care Support Services staff.



## MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS WORKING GROUP

Many organizations are represented as part of the Mental Health and Addictions Working Group (MHAWG), including community-based mental health and addictions providers, hospitals, Indigenous-led services, post-secondary education, primary care providers, and public health.

The vision of the MHAWG is to **enhance access to high-quality, evidence-based services and supports** across a person's entire lifespan. The services should be accessible, client-centred, high quality, coordinated, and equitable.

The working group is guided by the provincial strategy, Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System, and these are the local priorities:

- Identifying gaps in local mental health and substance use services using a needs-based planning model.
- Enhancing a coordinated access model that will provide individuals seeking care with seamless, easy-to-navigate, and equitable access to the right service or support at the right time.
- Developing a shared understanding of case management services, making necessary changes to optimize current resources, and supporting advocacy for additional investment.
- Implementing the Ontario Structured Psychotherapy Program, an evidence-based cognitive behavioural therapy program for people living with mild to moderate depression and anxiety.

The MHAWG was involved with the Needs-Based Planning Team, funded by Health Canada, with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Niagara was one of only six communities across Canada selected for the Needs-Based Planning Project. It's a model that estimates the resources required to address the needs for services relating to mental health and substance use problems in a given population, and Niagara's report showed that people are using crisis services because the other services they need are not available in the community in a timely way due to capacity issues.

Through MHAWG, local providers are working together to **enhance access to mental health and addiction services that are high-quality and evidence-based**.





## STROKE CARE



**People requiring stroke care remain a priority population** for the NOHT-ÉSON, and the Stroke Care Working Group (SCWG) continues to move forward with its population health and continuous quality improvement approach. Based on a review of service gaps and opportunities for improvement for people requiring stroke services, the working group identified several areas for improvement:

1. Access to the Acute Stroke Unit (ASU) for all clients with stroke;
2. Access to community stroke (intensive in-home) rehabilitation services;
3. Access to secondary prevention, stroke specialty clinics, and general medical follow-up;
4. Patient navigation and transition planning;
5. Standardized approach to and tools for client and family education;
6. Access to stroke-specific exercise and lifestyle programs in the community;
7. Public awareness and self-management; and
8. Use of advanced technology for monitoring and treatment.

The NOHT-ÉSON recently submitted a funding proposal to Ontario Health West on behalf of the SCWG to establish two strategies aimed at improving stroke system efficiency in Niagara and the outcomes and experiences of stroke patients:

1. Implementation of a Community Stroke Rehabilitation Program where patients receive intensive, multidisciplinary stroke care in their homes; and
2. Implementation of Stroke Patient Community Navigators to improve transitioning.

The NOHT-ÉSON and the SCWG await news on their proposal.



## COVID, COLD, AND FLU CARE CLINICS

The NOHT-ÉSON, led by the organization's Primary Care Clinical Lead, Dr. Darija Vujosevic, **established five COVID, Cold, and Flu Care Clinics (CCFCCs) in the region** for people who suffered from a respiratory illness and did not have access to a family doctor or nurse practitioner. The earlier-than-anticipated flu season, higher incidents of respiratory syncytial virus, and the ongoing incidents of COVID-19 and its variants necessitated the creation of the CCFCCs.

The five locations quickly came online in early December and continued to offer various hours, including evenings and Saturdays. Messaging and promotional materials were developed to support public awareness of the clinics.

From early December until the end of March 2023, Niagara's CCFCCs saw 1,016 visits across five different sites:

- St. Catharines (2), Niagara-on-the-Lake, and Welland - 751 visits
- Niagara Health's CCFCC location - 265 visits



## ALTERNATE LEVEL OF CARE

The NOHT-ÉSON is partnering with Toronto Grace Health Centre to institute the centre's remote care monitoring program. The purpose is to have patients **avoid unnecessary hospital admissions and to encourage the discharge of people with a non-acute diagnosis**. The organizations spent the latter part of 2022-2023 planning for the program's anticipated implementation in 2023-2024.

The team has developed a number of referral pathways into the program, including entry points specifically for Indigenous Peoples, Francophone populations, and older adults at risk of hospital admission.

Niagara residents will have access to various tech devices and remote health services that will enable them to remain safely at home. Different vital signs, such as temperature, heart rate, blood pressure, and O2 saturation, can be monitored remotely using the technology. Sensing devices capture information such as the patient's weight and movement. Automated medication dispensing and non medical monitoring technology are also possible for issues such as slips and falls and off-premises wandering.



## ASSISTANCE FOR NEWCOMERS TO CANADA

More than 5,000 newcomers from over 80 different countries have been temporarily housed in hotels in Niagara Falls since July 2022.

To be able to respond to their health and social service requirements, the NOHT-ÉSON received nearly \$75,000 to **expand service provider access** to remote interpretation services, allowing them to improve communication with and service delivery to their newcomer clients and patients. The services were also extended to five settlement service agencies in the region.

The Niagara Falls Community Health Centre and the Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara have accepted 255 and 280 new clients, respectively.

The two organizations have also collaborated on a joint proposal to increase primary care services for asylum seekers. They await a response from Ontario Health West.

Niagara Health, primary care providers in the community, the NOHT-ÉSON, and nursing representatives at the hotels have also developed pathways for people to access emergency departments in Niagara, and prenatal, antenatal, and post-partum care for approximately 70 pregnant women. The Niagara Falls Community Health Centre has also offered primary care to all babies.



## STRATEGIC PLAN

In the first half of 2023, the NOHT-ÉSON began developing its first strategic plan. The organization consulted with partners, community groups, people with lived experience navigating the health and social service systems, and other interested and affected parties to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas of opportunity. The strategic plan includes goals and measurable objectives related to **system integration, access to primary care, working better together as a system, and building health human resource capacity** in Niagara. The NOHT-ÉSON aims to share the full strategic plan in fall 2023.



## STAY CONNECTED

Do you have any questions or comments about our annual report or the NOHT-ÉSON? We want to hear from you. Please feel free to share your thoughts with us at [www.noht-eson.ca/contact-us](http://www.noht-eson.ca/contact-us). You can also find the NOHT-ÉSON on social media.



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