

The Niagara Ontario Health Team-Équipe Santé Ontario Niagara (NOHT-ÉSON) is a steadily growing network of more than 45 health care providers, social service agencies, educational institutions and patient/client and family/caregiver representatives. We are committed to working as one coordinated team to provide exceptional service, support and care to you, no matter when or where you need it, now and for our future generations.



## NOHT-ÉSON AND ONTARIO HEALTH REPRESENTATIVES MEET IN FORT ERIE

NOHT-ÉSON partners and staff gathered at the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre on April 3 and were joined by Ontario Health's President and Chief Executive Officer Matthew Anderson.

He was accompanied by Susan deRyk, Chief Regional Officer for Ontario Health Central and West Regions, Ontario Health West's Kris Bannerman, Director of System Strategy, Planning, Design, and Implementation, and Kelly Cimek, Director of Capacity, Access, and Flow.

The NOHT-ÉSON's Director of Planning, Sabrina Piluso, provided an overview of the organization and its structure, as well as highlights from recent initiatives, including Seamless Care Optimizing the Patient

Experience or SCOPE Niagara, Let's Go Home, and the COVID, Cold, and Flu Care Clinics.

Partners who were present took the opportunity to share the successes and challenges facing health care and social services in the NOHT-ÉSON's catchment area.

Some NOHT-ÉSON representatives emphasized the organization and its work have allowed for greater partnerships and collaboration on various initiatives that would not have occurred five years ago. Others stressed the importance of sustainability to maintain the work moving forward.

Anderson and deRyk were appreciative of the work achieved to date and understood the challenges faced, recognizing the importance of local-level planning.



*The Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre hosted a discussion between NOHT-ÉSON representatives and staff from Ontario Health, including President and CEO Matthew Anderson (far right).*



## NOHT-ÉSON LAUNCHES RESOURCE NAVIGATOR

Niagara residents have a new online tool to search for local and provincial health care and social services offered in the region.

Launched publicly on March 22, the Resource Navigator webpage consists of several categories that enable people to quickly identify the services they require, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The 24/7 Navigation project team engaged extensively with the region's patients, clients, families, caregivers, and community groups to identify existing health care and social services. The information is presented in a manner that is tailored to the person's needs.

The categories listed on the webpage include Urgent and/or Crisis Support, Home Health and Community Support, Indigenous and Francophone Health and Community Services, and Older Adult Care Services.



## CONNECTING DOCTORS WITH SPECIALISTS BENEFIT PATIENTS

The Seamless Care Optimizing the Patient Experience (SCOPE Niagara) is a local, virtual inter-professional care team that supports primary care providers through a single access point.

A partnership between Niagara Health, the Niagara Practitioners Healthcare Alliance, and Home and Community Care Support Services, SCOPE Niagara connects registered family physicians and nurse practitioners with internists, nurses, diagnostic imaging, and home and community care support services.



The Resource Navigator provides information in a convenient and coordinated manner, enabling people to be at the center of the decision-making regarding their health and well-being.

The Resource Navigator is also available in French at [www.noht-eson.ca/fr/explorateur-de-ressources](http://www.noht-eson.ca/fr/explorateur-de-ressources).

More than a year since SCOPE Niagara's launch, over 400 service requests have been received, over half of Niagara's primary care providers have registered, and most calls did not require a trip to the emergency department for the patient.

SCOPE Niagara is exceeding initial usage targets, and preliminary discussions are underway to include mental health and addictions, fracture clinics, and pediatrics.





## PATIENT/CLIENT AND FAMILY/ CAREGIVER PROFILE: OLGA MCNEILL

The Niagara Ontario Health Team – Équipe Santé Ontario Niagara (NOHT-ÉSON) recognizes the vital role played by patients, clients, families, and caregivers in creating an integrated health care and social services system for the Niagara region.

In particular, the NOHT-ÉSON sees the need to have patient/client and family/caregiver (PCFC) representatives embedded within the organization. Currently, three PCFC representatives sit at the NOHT-ÉSON's Planning Table, the organization's principal decision-making body, and on its various working groups.

Shortly after the Government of Ontario announced the formation of the NOHT-ÉSON, Olga McNeill became a member in the fall of 2019. Olga held a similar role with the former Local Health Integration Network (LHIN). LHIN members who worked with Olga suggested she consider continuing her advocacy for PCFCs at the new NOHT-ÉSON.

Although Olga lives in West Niagara, which is not part of the NOHT-ÉSON's catchment area, the Grimsby resident's doctor practices in Beamsville. As a result of this connection, the organization welcomed Olga's involvement. This 83-year-old woman has been an active participant ever since. Her primary interests are dementia care, home and community care, and issues affecting older people.

Olga's passion for improving health care comes from lived experience. Years ago, she realized in order to achieve the best outcomes she had to advocate strongly for her loved ones.



*Olga McNeill is a patient/client and family/caregiver representative for the NOHT-ÉSON.*

Among Olga's many concerns was her mother's treatment in long-term care. "My mother didn't die because she was 97," said Olga, "or because she had dementia. She died because she was left in her room on New Year's Eve, in a wheelchair, untethered."

"At the time, most of the caregivers had gone downstairs to welcome the New Year. My mother wanted to go to bed," continued Olga. "Mom had forgotten she could no longer walk, fell, and hit her head. She died the following month. It was not the way she should have died."

Even though a considerable amount of time has passed since her mother's death, Olga believes very little has changed when it comes to supporting older people.

"Unfortunately, this lack of support was made abundantly clear by the high death rates in long-term care during the COVID-19 pandemic," she said.

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"I want to make life easier for those who are in the same situation now," stated Olga, who is keenly aware there may come a day when she will require long-term care herself.

Two years after her mother died, Olga experienced another tragedy when her husband passed away from lung cancer. He died at 67, five months after receiving his diagnosis.

"Again," Olga said, "I found I was taking him to appointments, making health care decisions, and providing him with 24-hour care."

These experiences, among others, have enabled Olga to become a strong advocate for improvements to health care and social services.

Olga describes her time with the NOHT-ÉSON as interesting, thought-provoking, and stimulating. She has enjoyed the collaboration among the 40+ partner organizations and PCFC representatives.

She is also quick to note many of the NOHT-ÉSON's accomplishments have come from leveraging technology. She likes not travelling to every meeting and quite enjoys video conferencing applications like Zoom.

"While my personal experiences have informed my decision to participate in the NOHT-ÉSON," said Olga, "I have found working with other PCFC members and the many health care professionals to improve health care and the well-being of everyone in Niagara to be exceptionally rewarding."

The NOHT-ÉSON appreciates the dedication and efforts of our PCFC representatives, and our organization is continuously developing opportunities for patients, clients, families, and caregivers to engage and contribute to its initiatives.

Are you an advocate for enhanced health care and social services in Niagara? Are you interested in getting involved? Click here to visit the engagement section of the NOHT-ÉSON's website or contact Engagement Specialist Josie Faccini at [engagement@noht-eson.ca](mailto:engagement@noht-eson.ca).



**NIAGARANS WITHOUT  
A DOCTOR OR NURSE  
PRACTITIONER BENEFIT  
FROM COVID, COLD, AND  
FLU CARE CLINICS**

Late last fall, 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 offered various operating hours until March 31. Over that time, 1,016 people visited a CCFCC.



ÉQUIPE SANTÉ ONTARIO  
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# CONNECTED CARE

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## IMPROVING ACCESS TO COGNITIVE ASSESSMENTS

Niagara residents are experiencing significant wait times for admission into the Geriatric Assessment Program (GAP) and the Geriatric Rapid Assessment Clinic. As a result, the NOHT-ÉSON's Dementia Care Working Group is exploring 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 have been shown to delay admission to long-term care and improve client outcomes.

Teena Kindt, Chief Executive Officer for the Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region, and Naomi O'Brien, Respite Services Manager for the Niagara Region's Seniors Community Programs, are the working group's Co-Leads.

Currently, there is a 400-day waitlist to get into the specialized geriatric assessment program.

"According to some recent data," states Kindt. "46% of the referrals to the program are inappropriate."

Armed with this information, members of the Dementia Care Working Group rolled up their sleeves and have begun tackling the challenge.

In February, the working group hosted a focus group for people with lived experience at Niagara Region Headquarters in Thorold to better understand the successes and barriers to accessing support from



medical teams, specialized programs, and the community.

Several virtual town halls with Niagara practitioners were also hosted throughout the spring to find solutions to increase capacity and minimize referrals to specialized geriatric services that would be better served elsewhere.

Kindt states that they hope to learn more about what tools and resources practitioners need to assess their patients or refer them to appropriate pathways to receive timely cognitive assessments earlier in the disease process.

Since then, the Dementia Care Working Group has turned its attention to analyzing the data collected and is determining its next steps.

"Ultimately, we hope we can get people timely access to cognitive assessment, whether through specialized geriatric services or memory clinics," concludes Kindt.



## CREATING URINARY TRACT INFECTION AWARENESS

The NOHT-ÉSON's Home and Community Care Working Group has been focused on decreasing the number of hospital patients with an alternate level of care (ALC) designation. The term is used in hospitals to describe patients who occupy a bed but do not require the intensity of services provided in that care setting.

Using timely data, the working group discovered that 90% of people with an ALC designation were admitted to the hospital through the emergency department (ED); a significant portion of people had been diagnosed with dementia, and many of them visited an ED with a urinary tract infection (UTI) or related issues.

Clinical and general resources were created and shared widely by the working group 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, as well as alternative options for care. Presentations were made to long-term care and retirement homes in Niagara, along with education sessions with Home and Community Care Support Services staff.



## NIAGARA RESIDENTS TAKE PART IN COMMUNITY WELLNESS DAYS

Better health outcomes were top of mind at a pair of Community Wellness Days at the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre and St. Albert's Church in St. Catharines in March.

The Go Vaxx bus, Niagara's Mobile Dental Clinic, and several organizations were represented at the two Community Wellness Days, an initiative developed by the NOHT-ÉSON's Cancer Screening Working Group.

In addition to the working group, Community Health Brokers from Niagara Region Public Health and representatives from the Indigenous Health Network, the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Regional Cancer Program, and Brock University were also involved.

