

Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs

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Our Vision

The Waterloo Region Health Coalition (WRHC) was established to build a coalition of non-partisan individuals and organizations across Waterloo Region that are focused upon protecting our public health care system from threats such as cuts, delisting and privatization. We provide our members, member organizations and citizens across the region with information about our health care system, its programs and services, and aim to strengthen our public health system.

We are focused upon the principles of the Canada Health Act: universality; comprehensiveness; portability; accessibility and public administration. Our members are actively engaged in responding to public policy and to communicating with our elected officials, media and citizens on healthcare issues. Our goal is to strengthen and protect our public healthcare system and to ensure that it is comprehensive and adequately resourced. We promote public education and public participation that may inform our elected officials on the population based needs that our public healthcare should deliver in Waterloo Region.

Who Is Involved

The Waterloo Region Health Coalition (WRHC) represents more than 1,500 individuals as local WRHC members and/or participant members of affiliated groups. These groups include local social activists, seniors, healthcare professionals, labour and environmentalist, across Waterloo Region, that are supportive of our public health system. We are non partisan and encourage active members from all political parties.

Introduction:

Waterloo Region has suffered consistent public hospital downsizing over many decades. This has occurred despite a rapidly expanding population across the Region of Waterloo. Moreover, the demographic changes and the health care demands, which have been identified across the Province of Ontario with our aging population and higher acuity, are consistent across the Region of Waterloo. However, any analysis of the population needs, in a region that has undergone such a **rapid growth in population**, of **258%** from 1961 to 2020 (Please refer to Charts 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 below), has not been made available for public scrutiny. Our conclusion is that hospital capacity, as expressed in the total number of funded beds in this region, is inadequate. Hospital beds have been consistently cut. The highest number of beds, 1232, that was available to the people of this Region was seen back in 1971/1972. At that time the regional population was only 247,945 as compared to the current 2020 population of 619,136.

Source: Waterloo Region Health Coalition calculations from census data and Region of Waterloo Regional Government's population projections of 1.49% growth per year.

The region has seen **315 beds eliminated since 1971/1972**. We note that the population level has increased by over 258% and that the total number of the region's **hospital beds** have decreased by **-25.67%**. This trend is disturbing and illuminates that there is simply no alternative other than increasing hospital funding to a level that will optimize the number of beds across the region to meets population needs (Please refer to Charts 1.2, 2.2 & 3.2 below).

Source: Waterloo Region Health Coalition calculations from each regional hospital website and primary research completed at each hospital.

Recommendations:

1. Increase the total number of fully funded and resourced hospital beds to meet the needs of a rapidly increasing population in the Region of Waterloo

- Health care funding must be set at a rate that will meet public health care service needs.
- Hospital capacity expressed in hospital beds available to our population must be increased.

During our recent election candidate Ford, now Premier Ford, promised to end “**hallway medicine**” and improve access to long-term care. Yet the current government has cut overall hospital funding. It is clear that Ontarians have insufficient access to care, and in particular, access to a hospital bed. We frequently hear that patients are simply unable to be admitted to hospitals or are being pushed out of hospitals very quickly. Patients have waited prolonged time on stretchers in hallways, sunrooms, bathrooms, closets. These are not hospital beds and highlight the need for increased funding. The governments’ data indicates that Ontario ranks at the bottom, among all of the provinces in Canada, in public health funding. We are **\$728 per person below the average** of the rest of Canada. These data are undeniable. Consequently, capacity across the entire hospital including inpatient care needs to be restored to meet population need for care (Please refer to Charts 1.2, 2.2, 3.2 & 4 below).

Chart 1.1: Waterloo Region Populations 1961/1962

Population across Waterloo Region Cities and Townships	
Kitchener	75,485
Waterloo	21,366
Cambridge	
Galt	27,830
Preston	11,577
Hespeler	4,519
All Townships	33,000
Woolwich	
Wilmot,	
Wellesely,	
North Dumfries	
Waterloo Region Population	172,777

Chart 1.2: Waterloo Region total bed capacity 1961/1962

Hospital Beds across Waterloo Region	
St. Mary's Hospital	354
Grand River Hospital	438
Cambridge Memorial Hospital	145
Waterloo Region Total Beds	937

Chart 2.1: Waterloo Region Populations 2016/2017

Population across Waterloo Region Cities and Townships	
Kitchener	233,222
Waterloo	104, 986
Cambridge	129,920
Galt	N/A
Preston	N/A
Hespler	N/A
All Townships	
Woolwich	25,006
Wilmot,	20,545
Wellesely,	11,260
North Dumfries	10,215
Waterloo Region Population	535,154

NOTE: Waterloo Region population growth reached **247,945** in **1971/1972** and the total bed count across the region was subsequently increased to a total of **1,232 beds**. This was the high point in the number of beds prior to the onset of successive funding cuts and the consequent reductions in beds.

Chart 2.2: Waterloo Region total bed capacity 2016/2017

Hospital Beds across Waterloo Region	
St. Mary's Hospital	153
Grand River Hospital	567
Cambridge Memorial Hospital	145
Waterloo Region Total Beds	865

Chart 3.1: Waterloo Region Populations 2018/2019 & 2019/2020

Population across Waterloo Region Cities and Townships	
Kitchener	
Waterloo	
Cambridge	
Galt	
Preston	
Hespler	
All Townships	
Woolwich	
Wilmot,	
Wellesely,	
North Dumfries	
Waterloo Region Population 2018/2019	601,220
Waterloo Region Population 2019/2020	619,136

Chart 3.2: Waterloo Region total bed capacity 2019/2020

Hospital Beds across Waterloo Region	
St. Mary's Hospital	354
Grand River Hospital	438
Cambridge Memorial Hospital (Expansion Jan 2020)	197
Waterloo Region Total Beds	917

2. Comply with the internationally recognized standard (OECD) of 85% for hospital capacity rate for all three Waterloo Region hospitals.

- Restore the number of beds in Regional Hospitals to the 1971/1972 level and increase hospital funding to maintain a safe capacity rate.

Ontario currently funds its hospitals at the **lowest rate in Canada** (Please refer to Charts 4 and 5 below). The hospitals across the Region of Waterloo report that they are often operating at dangerous levels of overcrowding; Grand River Hospital (**GRH**) reports averaging **98.3%** capacity with frequent capacity levels above 100% and capacity level climbing beyond 110 %. With every bed being constantly utilized there is little room left to deal with any disaster; such as an multicar accident on the nearby 401 highway or a public health crisis such as influenza or a contagion similar to SARS. Furthermore, overcrowding and the pressure for speedy bed turnover are exacerbating nosocomial infections; hospital acquired infection rates, given the limited timelines for adequate infection control practices.

Furthermore, local EMS ambulance services report that the number of days in which they are operating at “**Code Zero**” with no ambulances available due to the bottleneck created by overcrowded emergency rooms has reached unprecedented levels. Paramedic services in Waterloo Region, from January to June of 2019, reported that paramedics responded to 24,608 calls, resulting in 28,942 vehicles going out to those calls. This was a 5.4 per cent increase in vehicle response from the same six month timeframe in 2018. Demand has increased. However, these same paramedics, between January and June of 2019, experienced **146.9 ambulance days lost** due to offloading delays.

Source: CBC News · Posted: Aug 14, 2019 9:20 AM ET: More calls to paramedic services in Waterloo region this year, report says

Evidence shows that in Ontario and in this Region that our hospitals require at least a **5.3% increase in hospital funding per year for the next four years**. Given that hospitals across the province are funded at a level that is well below the provincial averages in Canada. It is imperative that funding is established at a level that will meet the needs of the growing and aging population across the Region of Waterloo. Global funding for our hospitals has been below the rate of inflation, 2006 – 2016, and was frozen from 2012/2013 and again in 2016/2017. The 2018/2019 rate for global funding was, yet again, set below the rate of inflation. This inability to keep pace with inflation has meant that hospital budgets have been cut; **inflation-adjusted dollar decreases for more than a decade**. We did see a reprieve in 2018 with a small increase to hospital funding which has expired. Ontario now ranks at the bottom of comparable jurisdictions in hospital care and capacity levels. Decades of relentless cuts in funding have created this capacity crisis and the “Hallway Medicine” that we are experiencing. The Region of Waterloo needs a capacity plan to reopen closed beds, operating rooms, and ER staffing that will restore public hospital capacity to safe levels.

- **Reverse Staffing Cuts by increasing funding of hospitals and maintain funding levels at above inflation.**

Hospitals have cut services, closed clinics and operating rooms, reduced beds and cut frontline staff. This despite the capacity crisis and increasing wait times in our Emergency Rooms. Hospitals are now at dangerous levels of overcrowding and staffing levels have been cut. The **Grand River Hospital (GRH) cut a total of 70 frontline positions**, 30 were cut in 2018/2019 and then another 40 positions in 2019/2020; which represented a 1.6% reduction in overall staff level at GRH this year 2020 alone. Of these cuts to staff 80,000 registered nursing hours have been eliminated. That is a cut of **46 RN positions**, 32 full time RN and 14 part time RN positions at GRH. We are informed that further layoffs will continue and will potentially reach a total of 275 positions based upon funding statements from GRH executives. Despite these challenges in Waterloo Region the provincial government also intends to **close 49 of the 59 paramedic services** across the province. This proposal will see Waterloo Region amalgamated into one gigantic paramedic service supporting 2.3 million people, larger than Toronto, and likely located up to a hundred kilometres away from Waterloo Region. An “evidence free” plan that will further jeopardize health care delivery in this region. This plan must be reconsidered and an opportunity for review provided prior to implementation. There have been no cost analyses or indications of any service improvements provided to date.

Source: GRH's 2019 and 2020 Budget and Operating plan: June 2019, Ron Gagnon CEO, Page 3.

Source: The Record: July 23, 2019; Nursing cuts impacting quality of care at Kitchener's Grand River Hospital, union says Fewer RNs means less care, more patient complications, longer waits.

Source: The Record April 16 2019; Province's plan to cut local ambulance centres surprises Waterloo Region

Information from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Ontario Auditor General and Health Quality Ontario based upon data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) that compared hospital nurse staffing levels and public hospital funding (capacity) across Canada and the OECD, identifies the lack of beds as a **crisis**. The evidence is overwhelming. Ontario has cut more hospital beds and staff than any comparable jurisdictions. There are **14,320 less hospital beds** than the average number of beds per capita in the other provinces of Canada. We have seen our government **cut 18,000 hospital beds** since 1990. Despite this hospital beds, local clinics and services are continuing to be cut and closed at GRH. The Waterloo Wellington Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) has seen **23 staff cut and 6 vacant positions eliminated** as the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care moves to consolidate 20 health care agencies across the province into one massive entity called Ontario Health. Moreover, across the province, 416 administrative staff will be laid off and 409 vacant positions will be eliminated. A total of **825 administrative positions** supporting health care planning and delivery. Again no financial analysis or service improvement details have been forthcoming. Ontario is at the bottom of the country in public hospital funding. Ontario’s patient population now faces bed shortages and serious overcrowding situations and patient safety danger on a daily basis. Cuts to staff, beds and funding must be reversed across the Region of Waterloo and across Ontario.

Source: CBC News · Posted: Jun 19, 2019 12:00 PM ET | Last Updated: June 19, 2019; 29 'back-office' positions eliminated at Waterloo Wellington LHIN as part of provincial cuts
Source : Ontario Health Coalition calculations from: Canadian Institute for Health Information, *Data Table: Hospital Beds Staffed and in Operation 2017-18*. Population statistics from Canadian Institute for Health Information, *National Health Expenditures Database 2019* and Affleck et al., CMAJ 2013, Pages 362-363.

Chart 4: Ontario Public Sector Health Funding Per Capita 2017

Public Sector Health Funding Per Capita 2017	
Newfoundland & Labrador	\$6,018.93
Saskatchewan	\$5,535.74
Manitoba	\$5,434.79
Alberta	\$5,428.19
Prince Edward Island	\$5,052.36
Nova Scotia	\$5,043.89
New Brunswick	\$4,805.27
Quebec	\$4,547.07
Ontario	\$4,409.85
British Columbia	\$4,373.16
Average of other provinces	\$5,137.71

Source: Ontario Health Coalition calculations from CIHI, *National Health Expenditures Database 2019*

Chart 5: Ontario Public Sector Health Expenditure

Public Sector Health Expenditure as a % of Provincial GDP 2017	
Prince Edward Island	11.44%
Nova Scotia	11.23%
Manitoba	10.22%
New Brunswick	10.21%
Newfoundland & Labrador	9.62%
Quebec	9.04%
Saskatchewan	8.01%
British Columbia	7.63%
Ontario	7.51%
Alberta	6.94%
Average of other provinces	9.37%

Source: Ontario Health Coalition calculations from CIHI, *National Health Expenditures Database 2019*

Chart 6: Hospital Beds Per 1000 (population) By Province

Hospital Beds Per 1000 (population) By Province 2017-18	
Newfoundland & Labrador	4.5
New Brunswick	3.7
Manitoba	3.3
Nova Scotia	3.3
Prince Edward Island	3.3
Saskatchewan	2.7
Alberta	2.7
British Columbia	2.5
Ontario	2.2
Average other provinces	3.2

Source : Ontario Health Coalition calculations from: Canadian Institute for Health Information, *Data Table: Hospital Beds Staffed and in Operation 2017-18*. Population statistics from Canadian Institute for Health Information, *National Health Expenditures Database 2019*