

# Island health organizations sign Ontario Health Team application

By [Warren Schlote](#) - December 4, 2019

## **Signatories say an OHT would strengthen Island partnerships**

LITTLE CURRENT – Members of the Manitoulin Collaborative of healthcare providers signed in support of a Manitoulin Ontario Health Team (OHT) application, a local care delivery model that is part of the phase-out of Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), at a meeting of the group held Wednesday, November 27.

“I’m very pleased that we’ve come to the table with an understanding and a willingness to take this step, and I want to congratulate all the partners,” said Manitoulin Health Centre (MHC) president and CEO Lynn Foster. MHC is one of the members of the collaborative which also includes long-term care providers, First Nations health services, family health teams and mental health services, among others.

The provincial government announced in March 2019 that it planned to dissolve the LHIN model of regional health co-ordination in favour of OHTs. It invited groups of healthcare providers within a region to complete a self-assessment that outlines what services they currently provide, how they work together and how their structure would fit into the OHT model.

The Ministry of Health opened the first round of self-assessment submissions in April of 2019. The strongest applicants were then invited to submit full applications.

Another subset was classed as “in development” and provincial officials worked with those groups to strengthen their proposals before the full application. All full applications had to be submitted by October 9.

Just last week, Ontario began to announce the first successful candidates from the first intake. The Mississauga OHT was first to be announced, on November 25, followed by the Hamilton OHT, the latter of which includes places such as Aurora, Newmarket, Bradford and Keswick. Further announced OHTs include, as of press time Monday, Southlake (Aurora-Newmarket region), Durham, Burlington, North York and Guelph and area.

The Manitoulin Collaborative has now submitted a self-assessment document that outlines which services the signatories already provide to their communities, how they work together as a group and how their plans would fit into the OHT model. Their signatures on the document are non-binding; they

merely indicate the partners' willingness to proceed with the application to the Ministry of Health.

From here, the next step will be for provincial officials to review all applications from this intake. The next invitation for full application submissions will be in March 2020.

Several members of the Manitoulin Collaborative expressed excitement in moving forward to the next phase of this application.

"Our previous relationship goes back as far as 2014 and it's based on the good work we've done. We're committing to each other to take this on in the best interest of the patient," said Ms. Foster.

Manitoulin offers a smaller coverage area than some proposed OHTs; however, the Manitoulin Collaborative has already implemented several initiatives the province is requesting of OHT applicants.

Ms. Foster cited the strategic plan shared among collaborative partners, a quality improvement plan, the network of care providers, groups for mental health and palliative care and a shared IT system.

"The standardized infrastructure brings stability to the digital world. When our physicians and clinicians are caring for patients, they can rely on stable, sustainable infrastructure. They don't have to worry about the computer, they can worry about the patient," said Ms. Foster.

OHT applications are judged based on the strength of eight aspects of healthcare: patient care and experience; patient partnership and community engagement; defined patient population; in-scope services; leadership, accountability and governance; performance measurement, quality improvement and continuous learning; funding and incentive structure; and digital health.

"When we looked at each of those and self-evaluated our readiness, we tended to be on the stronger side. As we go down this path, given our expectations at this early stage, our group here on Manitoulin feels confident," said Ms. Foster.

Manitoulin Lodge Nursing Home administrator Sue Farren said the OHT application was a natural extension of the work that Island healthcare providers already offer.

"(The Manitoulin Collaborative) is a unique group of healthcare partners who are genuinely dedicated to quality healthcare for residents of the Island and area. The submission of the OHT self-assessment form demonstrates our commitment to continuous quality care for all those who access the healthcare system," she told The Expositor.

Noojmowin Teg Health Centre executive director Pam Williamson said the group model speaks to some of the values held by her Indigenous-focused health organization.

“Noojmowin Teg is a firm believer in having more accessible services for the community members who live on the Island,” she said, adding that having all providers organized under the OHT structure would enable better co-ordination between care providers.

Ms. Williamson added that the new model may enhance the availability of appropriate care across system users on Manitoulin.

“I feel this may be an opportunity for all services to be more culturally sensitive to everybody, but also that there be some attention paid to the Indigenous services being promoted so they remain as important as they are,” she said.

Ms. Foster noted that the application process is still in its early stages and there are questions yet to be answered, such as determining which Manitoulin Collaborative partner will hold the direct relationship with the Ministry of Health, or how to effectively manage the varying staffing models in place at care providers across the Island.

However, the ministry has called for applications with the understanding that there will be questions at the local level. It will collaborate with the ultimately successful OHT applicants to work through some of the possible growing pains.