



PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

niagarahealth





Land Acknowledgment

Land Acknowledgments demonstrate recognition of Indigenous lands, treaties and peoples. They are a small and important step in the process of reconciliation and building a positive relationship with Indigenous peoples.

Niagara Health is honoured to provide care on lands where Indigenous Peoples have lived for thousands of years with their own unique cultures, identities, traditions and languages. These lands are steeped in the rich history of the First Nations such as the Hatiwendaronk, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. There are many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today.

We are committed to listening and learning more about the history and current experiences of Indigenous Peoples and acknowledge our responsibility to take meaningful action towards reconciliation in the healthcare system.

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Introduction to Niagara Health

Niagara Health (NH) is a large, five-site regional hospital system and a growing network of community-based and virtual services. We believe every person in our region deserves to live every day of their life in the best health possible. As a community-based academic centre, our focus on teaching and learning, research, innovation, and partnership propels us to continually improve care and make a difference in people's lives.

Our team is made up of more than 7,300 employees, physicians, volunteers, and patient partners who contribute to our purpose of providing **Extraordinary Caring. Every Person. Every Time.** Our Accreditation with Exemplary Standing in 2019 is a clear demonstration of the team's commitment to the highest safety and quality standards.

This report is intended to:

- Highlight and celebrate the partnerships between NH, the Niagara Health Engagement Network (NHEN), and its Patient Partners;
- Highlight some key engagement initiatives that have authentically incorporated patient and family voices and perspectives into the everyday work and patient-centred culture at NH; and
- Acknowledge and identify areas and opportunities to further expand the impact and reach of the NHEN.



Niagara Health Engagement Network (NHEN)

OVERVIEW

In 2018 and through to 2019, NH embarked on a journey to co-design an innovative model of patient and family partnership to foster a more authentic engagement process and experience with our patients, families, and community. Moving away from a more static Patient and Family Advisory Committee (PFAC), the NHEN was formed, which is a group of volunteers on a 'roster' that represent the different patient, family, and community interests from across the region we serve. Members of the NHEN are referred to as Patient Partners. The NHEN uses a rostered approach that provides Patient Partners with various options of ways to participate. Patient Partners are able to self-determine what types of engagement activities they wish to participate in as well as when, and how often they wish to partner based on their interests and knowledge. In so doing, through the NHEN, NH can engage and partner with many patients and families across Niagara who bring varied perspectives. As a result, the NHEN has leveraged a fluid engagement style that allows for more innovative and diverse models of engagement.

The perspectives of patients, families, and caregivers reflects a shift to shared accountability, embedding lived experiences and insights into our efforts to improve the care experience, and improve quality and safety of care.

The NHEN is deeply rooted in our commitment to create meaningful and authentic partnerships with patients, families, and community members and the engagement in decision-making. Patient Partners receive onboarding and education from NH and from the Patient Partnerships and Relations team, including orientation to NH, and how the process of engagement unfolds. Opportunities for partnership include working on committees, working groups, special projects, co-design events, and many other initiatives.



MEET SOME OF OUR PATIENT PARTNERS:

Since the NHEN began in 2019, we have recruited over 50 Patient Partners who have been engaged in over 160 initiatives across NH. We would like to introduce you to some of our Patient Partners who have shared this journey with us to share their stories and reflections on their experiences of working on the NHEN. These Patient Partners have had, and continue to have, positive impacts on how we deliver healthcare at NH.

Please meet, **Gail, Daniel, Catherine, Susan, David, and Mary**. This is merely a snapshot of some of the wonderful patients and families we have had the privilege of working alongside at NH.



Gail Riihimaki, Patient Partner

“ I have been a Patient Partner with Niagara Health for just over a year. In this short time, I have had the opportunity to work on a number of initiatives. These have ranged from very specific time limited projects (updating the Patient Handbook, participation in mini mock tracers in preparation for Accreditation) to those that are longer term and more strategic in nature (Accreditation Steering Committee, Quality and Patient Experience Committee).

My involvement as a Patient Partner began as a result of my interactions with Patient Relations. My mother received care at Niagara Health in January 2022 and I provided feedback to Patient Relations after her death. I wrote a letter of compliment about the front-line staff who presented as positive, professional, kind and caring. I also wrote a detailed letter of complaint identifying a number of system issues that we felt resulted in poor care and an experience that was very traumatic for my mother, and my sister and I. The invitation to become a Patient Partner followed a meeting with members of the Patient Relations team where our concerns were discussed.

I understand that change cannot happen overnight at a large organization such as Niagara Health. I hope, however, that I am able to bring the voice of the patient and caregiver to decision making tables. I also feel that the opportunity to contribute as a Patient Partner has had a positive impact on my own journey in recovering from our experience, and my hope is that I am able to assist in improving the patient experience at Niagara Health.”



Daniel Krowchuk

“ My involvement as a Patient Partner began in 2021 when I learned about the network from a past Patient Partner. Through this journey, I have worked with many individuals at NH and seen first-hand their dedication and passion that is supported by a culture of inclusion. I have been involved in initiatives to celebrate successes in caring, to improve the care experiences of patients, to develop information materials, and to inform work that will affect the future of patient care at Niagara Health. I can see myself and the community in the work of Niagara Health because of the NHEN.”

“ I have been a Patient Partner since 2019 and have been on a variety of committees where I am encouraged to ask questions and provide my point of view to physicians, nurses, administrators and technicians. I feel privileged to add the patient perspective to every conversation while keeping in mind that we are representing patients that wouldn't otherwise have a voice. I am proud of what we, the NHEN, are working towards.”



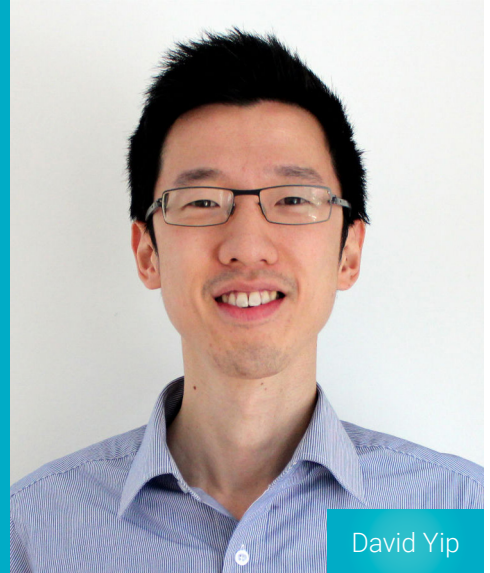
Catherine Bourque



Susan Gibson

“ As a member of the NHEN, my time as a Patient Partner has been highly successful. Attending committee meetings has been great because committee members listen and engage Patient Partners. Being a Patient Partner has helped make impactful changes to Niagara Health. It became difficult when Covid hit, and meetings were canceled or moved to online Teams meetings; I prefer in-person conversations, it gives us the chance to connect differently, and I look forward to returning to this in the future.”

“ I’ve been a patient partner since March of 2020. Since then I’ve been fortunate to be part of many initiatives; however the most salient in my mind is my participation in the Niagara Health strategic planning process. I was honoured to be part of the process and to have my views considered alongside those of NH’s senior leadership. It was a wonderful opportunity to work with the board, staff, as well as NH’s consulting team. I joined the NHEN shortly after one of my children was born at the hospital as a way to give back and contribute some time and expertise to hopefully improve healthcare delivery in the Region.”



David Yip



Mary Maida

“ The most impactful initiatives I’ve been involved with have been Accreditation and the new design concepts for the new South Niagara hospital. Both have allowed me the opportunity to provide input and gain insight on a macro level and help to evoke real change in the system.”

NHEN STRUCTURE

At NH we understand engaging patients and families and welcoming them into the work we do must be done in a supportive and meaningful way. The first step to enhancing our engagement strategy was the introduction, education, and training of our staff using an evidence-based model of engagement, known as the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Model of Public Participation. This model serves as the foundation for the way in which engagement occurs at NH. In 2020, over 75% of the Patient Partners participated in on-site workshops and IAP2 training sessions. In addition, over 50% of our managers, directors, and South Niagara Hospital project team leads participated in the same workshops.

IAP2 Model of Public Participation

The NHEN builds upon established frameworks of engagement, particularly the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. The model was developed by an international group that seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation in relation to individuals, governments, institutions, and healthcare systems around the world.

The model is divided into five levels of public participation that are clearly defined and ensure consistency. Each level has a goal and promise to the public, which allows for accountability and clarity in expectations (see figure 1).

INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Websites • Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberative polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen advisory committees • Consensus-building • Participatory decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated decision

Figure 1

The IAP2 framework is used to clearly articulate the type and scope of the engagement initiative and helps to provide clarity on the expectations and role of the Patient Partners in the engagement initiative. Once that is established and Patient Partners express their interest in joining an initiative, the Patient Partnerships and Relations team initiates a matching process (see figure 2). This model has been acknowledged by NH staff for its effectiveness and has been commended by Patient Partners as a genuine commitment to authentic and meaningful partnership.



Figure 2

At the conclusion of the engagement, where appropriate, there is visual representation of the role that Patient Partners played in the engagement activity such as:



COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In response to the rapidly changing landscape associated with the evolving global pandemic, NH recognized the immense and often negative impact on the patient and family experience as a result of:

- Curtailing face-to-face meetings and shifting to virtual meetings and gatherings;
- Postponement of elective surgeries, non-urgent ambulatory procedures; and
- Restricted/limited hospital visitation

PARTNERING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

NH remained committed to our partnership with patients and families throughout the pandemic. During this time, NH maintained active engagement with Patient Partners and the NHEN as much as possible. Seeking flexible ways to include patient and family voices remained a key priority as NH was faced with difficult decisions related to the COVID-19 pressures.

With a primary focus on COVID-19, the NHEN quickly adapted to these changes by responding in new and innovative ways such as virtual team meetings and seeking feedback and input through questionnaires and surveys. In addition, concerted efforts were made to ensure clarity, consistency, and authenticity in partnering on new initiatives in many different ways, such as:

- Connecting with Patient Partners prior to the first meeting of the initiative to brief Patient Partners in order to support Patient Partners, ensuring they felt prepared and informed;
- Introduction of an 'icebreaker' question to introduce the Patient Partner to all attendees and foster open communication and collaboration in a neutral and safe way;
- Ensuring that the scope of engagements initiative(s) were clear to the Patient Partners; and
- Encouraging and supporting Patient Partners to ask questions and contribute.

253,679
VACCINATIONS

#TeamNiagara **#GotTheShot** **#VaccinateNiagara**

In it Together
niagarahealth
Extraordinary Caring. Every Person. Every Time.

Hospitals across the province made the difficult decision to introduce visitor restrictions in response to COVID-19. This was a measure to safeguard our patients, families, staff, physicians, and community. Two examples of ways in which our Patient Partners played a key role in helping to shape organizational direction:

Visitation Restrictions – Consultation Initiative

When NH needed to introduce visitor restrictions, Patient Partners were engaged to help inform the development of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on NH's external website, as well as ways to ensure screening information was clear and more prominent. As did many hospitals, recognizing these were challenging and difficult times, NH introduced a visitor restriction appeals process. Patient Partners helped to inform special considerations related to the appeals process, such as who patients and families could contact if they wished to appeal a visitation barrier, and the appropriate NH team members who would hear the patient and family voice and determine if an exception to visitation was safe and appropriate.

NH's Patient Partner voice continued to be a key resource as we moved through the subsequent waves of the pandemic and continuously evaluated our visitation restrictions. Supporting and collaborating on decisions such as blocks of time to open again to family and visitor presence, how and when to communicate with patients, families, and the community on re-introducing visitation, as well as reviewing and sharing the patient perspective on the communications NH was sharing with the community, including how they were integral to respectfully and compassionately connecting with the Niagara community as we welcomed visitors back to our hospital sites.

Critical Care Triage Communication – Consultation Initiative

In Spring 2021, NH and hospitals across Ontario began to experience increased demand for critical care services. This resulted in the need to have difficult conversations on how to allocate and prioritize access to care for critically ill patients. The need for clear communication with the community was critical and Patient Partners were integral in helping to inform this communication. NH hosted a virtual meeting with several Patient Partners to seek their feedback. This engagement resulted in a recommendation to transparently share public facing metrics on the NH website related to COVID-19 case reporting and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) cases. In addition, Patient Partners also provided feedback and input on a letter for patients and families regarding the potential need to transfer patients to other NH units or sites, ensuring access to ICU care for patients in dire need of these resources.

In April 2022, as restrictions began to lift and regular activities began to resume at NH, the Patient Partnerships and Relations team conducted phone interviews with each member of the NHEN. The purpose of these calls was to check in with Patient Partners after a challenging two years, obtain feedback about the current state of the NHEN, and confirm their interest in continuing their participation. All NHEN members expressed their desire to continue and the phone calls generated a substantial amount of qualitative feedback, particularly related to the type of support they needed to continue to be involved with the NHEN, emphasizing the desire to have more opportunities to engage with NH on a regular basis.

NHEN Engagement

Since the introduction of the NHEN, Patient Partners have worked alongside staff on **over 160 different initiatives**. Over 26 departments across the organization have formally requested partnerships on key initiatives and the types of engagement have varied across the IAP2 spectrum. Engagement activity types and methods have ranged from virtual health literacy reviews to in-person co-design initiatives and committee membership. To date, some of the types of initiatives that Patient Partners have participated in include:

Co-Design

Patient Partners actively worked with NH staff to co-design the Patient and Family Declaration of Values, Patient and Family Bill of Rights, and a new Patient Handbook for patients admitted for care at NH.

Education Event

Patient Partners participate in various education sessions to broaden their understanding and knowledge of the health system such as Indigenous Cultural Sensitivity Training and Solution Focused Coaching.

Collaboration

Patient Partners help to develop alternatives, options and proposals such as the Wayfinding strategy for the Niagara new South build facility and the Health Workforce Innovation working group.

Interview Panels

Patient Partners are active participants on interviewing and hiring panels.

Consultation

NH team leads share curated content and information with Patient Partners with options, inviting feedback, open discussion, and recommendations.

Health Literacy

Patient Partners provide valuable feedback on patient and public facing communication material to ensure clear communication to support health literacy.

Committee Membership

Patient Partners participate in a variety of Committees such as the Strategic Planning Committee of the Board, Quality and Patient Experience Committee of the Board, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, Clinical Quality Council, Ethics Committee, Working Groups related to the South Niagara site build, HIS Implementation Committee, Patient Partner Communication Committee, Accessibility Committee, NH Knowledge Institute, Emergency Department Length of Stay Committee, and more.

Patient Story telling

Patient Partners share their stories to provide context, motivation, and buy-in.

Quality Improvement (QI)

Patient Partners are involved in QI initiatives such as improving Gynecology care, informing the More2Eat study, and refreshing the Patient Relations process.

Here are some further examples of how our Patient Partners are making a difference at NH and across the spectrum of engagement.

Quality and Patient Experience Committee of the Board

Committee Membership

At the start of 2023, two Patient Partners joined NH's Quality and Patient Experience Committee of the Board. These Patient Partners serve as ex-officio voting members for a two-year term, at which time new Patient Partners will be recruited. By including Patient Partners as members, the Quality and Patient Experience Committee of the Board is integrating and amplifying the perspectives of patients and families at the governance level.

Patient and Family Declaration of Values

Co-Design

The NHEN led the co-design of the Patient and Family Declaration of Values (PDoV). A literature review and an environmental scan of partner organizations across the province was conducted as a starting point. Patient Partners participated in the following way:

1. Participated in data collection by interviewing patients, families, visitors, and staff about what matters to them. This included:
 - Rounding at all five hospital sites to conduct semi-structured interviews to obtain feedback from patients, families, visitors, and staff.
 - Stationed booths positioned in high traffic areas throughout three major hospital sites to obtain feedback. A large poster was displayed at the booths throughout public areas and patients, families, and visitors were asked to share perspectives, words, and statements about their values, what is important to them in care, and what health care meant to them.

2. Data analysis and theming.
3. Final selection and review of Value statements, themes, and statements.

Two Patient Partners worked alongside staff to gather 1,034 responses from patients, families, and staff regarding their values. One Patient Partner analyzed all of the responses utilizing a Grounded Theory Approach to identify eight values that informed NH's new PDoV.

The final PDoV was then used as a model and platform to refresh and renew the Patient and Family Bill of Rights, a second co-design event involving more than 15 Patient Partners.

Patient and Family Bill of Rights

As a partner in your healthcare, your participation is important.

We need you to:

- Be an active participant in your own care.
- Ask questions until you believe you have all of the information you need to make informed healthcare decisions.
- Partner with us in developing a safe and timely discharge plan.
- Provide accurate personal health information to inform your healthcare team.
- Respect staff and physicians according to Niagara Health's Code of Conduct.

Understand Niagara Health will not tolerate verbal or physical abuse of staff, physicians, patients or visitors.

Consider that the needs of other patients may sometimes be more urgent than your own and that we are doing our best to meet everyone's needs.

Choose someone in advance to act or make decisions for you, should the need arise.

Safe, Quality Care

You have the right to **timely, high quality care** that meets or exceeds your expectations.

Your care will be provided in a **consistent, reliable manner** by highly skilled and knowledgeable staff and physicians.

We will **collaborate** with you to ensure **seamless transitions** throughout your care, including a safe and supportive discharge.

Our care follows best practice guidelines and is rooted in **research and innovation**.

Empathy and Compassion

We seek **meaningful, authentic partnerships** in providing your care.

At Niagara Health, our **staff and physicians promise to show compassion** in a friendly caring environment.

We will **demonstrate empathy through our actions** to you to understand what matters most in your care journey.

Respect and Dignity

We promise to provide an **environment that is free from judgment and is respectful** of your individual identity, beliefs, values and culture.

We will **protect your health information** and respect your privacy and confidentiality.

At Niagara Health, we promise our **staff and physicians will treat you with respect and dignity**, calling you as a whole person and not just a diagnosis.

Person-Centred Care

We will partner with our patients and families to **co-develop individualized care plans** that acknowledge unique physical, mental and emotional needs.

You can expect a **patient-centered approach** where your voice matters and you can feel safe to share your concerns.

Together, we will **develop mutually defined goals** inclusive of your personal preferences and needs.

Meaningful Communication

You can expect to be **meaningfully involved in transparent, collaborative conversations** about your care in terms you can understand.

You have the **right to ask questions about your care** to make an informed and confident decision.

Your care plan will be **revised frequently and collaboratively** with you to ensure you are an **active participant** in your own care.

You have the right to identify family and/or supports that can be **valuable contributors** in your circle of care.

Healing Atmosphere

You have the right to have your care provided in a safe, positive environment that **promotes healing and recovery**.

You can expect a **welcoming, clean atmosphere** with clear signage and personable staff and physicians to help you find your way.

Valued Care Team

Our environment is **free from aggression, disruptive behaviour and harassment**.

Our **promise is to protect** our patients, families, staff, physicians and community.

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Safe Quality Care

Care is comprehensive, effective and enables a safe return home.

Meaningful Communication

Healthcare providers communicate frequently, clearly, and transparently with us. We are informed and always considered members of the care team.

Valued Care Team

The healthcare team is safe, valued and respected by the organization, patients and one another.

Empathy and Compassion

We are treated with the highest degree of empathy through all care interactions. Healthcare providers exemplify compassion, awareness, understanding with a holistic lens.

Respect and Dignity

Interactions and ongoing care relationship between us (patients/families) and healthcare providers centres around mutual respect, caring, kindness and understanding.

Person-Centred Care

Care is personalized and patient-centred. We are comfortable, and our goals and needs are met.

Healing Culture

The hospital culture encourages healing by cultivating hope, caring and warmth through care. Staff, physicians and volunteers welcome us, our families and visitors.

CO-DESIGNED BY Patient Partners

Niagara Health Engagement Network

Hiring Panels

Interview Panels

Patient Partners increasingly play key roles on hiring panels. For example, the NH Board of Directors requested that a Patient Partner participate on the hiring committee for the President and CEO. The Patient Partner was a full participating member and supported the committee to finalize a position profile which outlined the skills, experience, and characteristics desired in a candidate, they also helped inform the approach to advertising; participated in the short-listing and interview process; and made a recommendation on the referred candidate.

Most recently, Patient Partners served on the hiring panel for positions such as the Executive Vice President, Practice, Clinical Support and Chief Nursing Executive as well as the Director, Patient Experience.

Health Information System (HIS) Implementation Committee

Committee Membership

A Hospital Information System (HIS) is a system to manage healthcare data – an electronic medical record. NH is introducing a new HIS to support our delivery of modern, world class healthcare services in Niagara. It will be state-of-the art technology to manage healthcare data and improve the safety, quality, and consistency of patient care across the health system in our community and there will be opportunities for improved communication with patients. Two Patient Partners are voting members of the HIS Implementation Committee to provide input on the design and build of this project.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

Committee Membership

NH's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee was formed in 2020 and includes a diverse representation of staff and physicians, from equity-deserving populations and areas across NH.

Two Patient Partners have been active members of the DEI committee since inception. They have been an integral part of DEI decision making and event planning throughout NH. Some of the decisions and work they have been part of include:

- Development of the DEI Action Plan;
- Informed the development of training and education for staff and physicians;
- Event planning (Black History Month, Pride Month, Indigenous Inclusion Month, and Celebrate Diversity Month activities);
- Recommendations on guest speakers for various events;
- Input on content design for a DEI key concepts with video education and training series;
- Helping to identify inclusive recruitment strategies; and
- Generally supporting NH to create a safe, inclusive, and respectful workplace.

As NH continues on this journey, Patient Partners will continue to have a voice on this committee and make recommendations on various initiatives that focus on DEI, contributing significantly to improving our culture at NH.



New South Niagara Hospital Initiatives

Co-Design

Another important initiative that welcomed Patient Partner voices is the new South Niagara Hospital which will be located in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Since the beginning, the South Niagara Hospital has been designed with feedback and input from patients and Indigenous community partners, who took part in planning and design workshops from 2019 to 2022. Their input helped to create the Project Specific Output Specifications (PSOS), a 15,000 page contractually binding document that was the primary guiding tool used in the hospital's design. Senior friendly features, the patient and family experience, accessibility, safety, wayfinding, art selection, and environmental leadership are only some of the areas where NH's Patient Partners helped to inform and provide meaningful input into the overall design.

Most recently, new and returning Patient Partners were recruited to form the Patient and Indigenous Partner Committee for the South Niagara Hospital. Input collected from the committee will help influence decisions for the new hospital, largely in areas around accessibility, patient journey, wayfinding and signage, art, and interior design, among other areas. Members of the committee will also take part in events such as attending and participating in room mock-ups, furniture road shows, community events, and helping to guide tours of the new facility when built.

Together, we are designing a new kind of healthcare that puts the focus on the patient, family, and community experience, promoting staff and caregiver work life satisfaction, and environmental health while improving the health and well-being of all hospital users.



Integrated Quality and Safety Framework

Consultation

Another key initiative that involved engagement with patients and families, was the development and design of the Integrated Quality and Safety Framework (IQSF). In 2019, NH used a robust engagement strategy to develop the IQSF. This included a review of literature, an environmental scan of peer hospital approaches, and a review of our data (i.e., patient experience surveys, Patient Safety Culture Surveys, internal performance data, etc.). This was all complimented by extensive

and broad consultation with patients, families, staff, volunteers, and physicians through a multi-faceted approach with face-to-face interviews, completion of over 900 surveys, 30 huddle conversations, four focus groups, and three ‘beta testing’ focus groups. With over 1,000 perspectives and voices, we were able to translate the dimensions into meaningful statements as reflected in the chart below.

Quality Dimensions	What Quality Means to Patients and Families
<p>Safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe care happens when we continue to improve our practice and learn from our challenges to avoid harm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know I am receiving the best and safest possible care when there is a collaborative approach and I am respected as an informed member of my care team.
<p>Accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care is improved by focusing on reducing the time our patients and their families wait for services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being acknowledged, seen within a timely manner, and providing ways to be updated are important to me.
<p>Community and Client Centeredness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We partner with our community, patients and families to provide care that is respectful, responsive, and inclusive of preference, needs, and values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients are involved in all aspects of their care in ways that are transparent, individualized, and our values always matter.
<p>Support for Our Teams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We provide support to each other in our working relationships that allows for the best possible care and outcome to occur for our patients and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When healthcare providers work together to create a friendly, compassionate, supportive, and caring environment, this means better patient care.
<p>Effective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We improve patient outcomes by providing care that is evidence based and standardized across our teams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My care will include best practices and provide me the best possible outcome ‘for me’.
<p>Efficient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We improve care through standardizing and creating reliable processes to ensure an optimal care experience and work environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My care experience will be reliable and dependable every time I need it.

The IQSF was reviewed and approved by our Patient Partners. In January 2023, NH released its new strategic plan of which safe and quality care is a core pillar. The work of the strategic plan was then leveraged in refreshing the 2023 IQSF to ensure alignment strategies and activities that will allow us to reach out quality and safety goals.

Family Presence - Essential Care Partner Program

Co-Design

Having a familiar person available to patients who can provide different types of support can help improve their health outcomes. To better support patients and families, NH implemented the Essential Care Partner (ECP) program. This program was co-designed with Patient Partners, clinical front-line staff, and leadership. An ECP is a pre-approved person (often a loved one or someone familiar to the patient) who has been deemed essential to the well-being of the patient and becomes part of the care team while the patient is in the hospital. Allowing an ECP to support the patient 24/7 during their care journey the ECP can work collaboratively with the patient and care team supporting the patient's goals and care outcomes with a strong patient-centered approach. Within the first four months of the introduction of the program in 2021, 1500+ ECPs had been trained and connected with their loved ones. This was at a time when visitation restrictions were introduced to hospitals across Ontario. The ECP program continues to support patients along their care journey and to date NH has had over 2,200 ECPs in the program. Our success was anchored in the co-design process and would not have been possible without the valuable input from Patient Partners who were involved from the onset of the process. This innovative program was recently recognized as a Leading Practice by Health Standards Organization (HSO).

Virtual Urgent Care Project

Consultation

In 2021, NH received funding to establish a virtual urgent care service. With increasing volumes, wait times, and pressures on emergency departments across the province, this was a rich opportunity to offer alternatives for the Niagara community seeking urgent care. Two Patient Partners were matched to collaborate at the early stages of planning with the NH team to provide the patient perspective and the user experience of a new Virtual Urgent Care service. The Patient Partners provided input on the communications and design of the initiative. Once the virtual platform was nearly ready, three additional Patient Partners were engaged to test the platform. This work began in late 2021 and continued through to Spring 2022, with the Patient Partners working closely with the Emergency Department and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) team to ensure an accessible, transparent, and effective Virtual Care Program was available to the community. Niagara Health's Virtual Urgent Care platform launched in March 2022, providing patients with a convenient and safe new option for seeking care.

Niagara Health Knowledge Institute Advisory Committee

Committee Membership

The Niagara Health Knowledge Institute (NHKI) was launched in May 2023 and aims to transform healthcare in Niagara through knowledge generation and mobilization. The NHKI's mission is to lead community hospital-based research in Canada and advance healthcare and health service delivery through research, quality improvement, and education. Two Patient Partners were invited to join the NHKI Advisory Committee, which provides strategic oversight to the NHKI and ensures alignment of all activities against the vision, purpose, and values of NH. The Patient Partners work alongside the NH senior leadership team, research representatives from academic institutions, and an Indigenous Health Services and Reconciliation representative to provide strategic oversight and direction to the NHKI.



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KNOWLEDGE
Institute

Our Journey Forward: Honouring Truth and Reconciliation

NH's Indigenous Health Services and Reconciliation (IHS&R) team was introduced in early 2023 as an in-hospital support, focused on improving patient care and experience for Indigenous community members and their families. The IHS&R team works diligently to increase the capacity of NH as a whole, through experiential education, informal education sessions, as well as direct patient care. Staff have had opportunities to learn and participate in healing practices such as sacred fires, smudging, and drumming.

Increasing the awareness, and visibility of the contribution that the Indigenous community has made, and continues to make, through ongoing collaboration and partnership builds a strong support system within NH for staff and patients. The IHS&R team is able to bring community together to support the growth and learning of NH staff, support research initiatives, and provide culturally and spiritually safe and appropriate care to Indigenous community members. Ensuring a community approach to healthcare allows us to support to our patients and families in their most emotional times, providing cultural end of life ceremony and care, and ensuring the connection to community supports are available as needed. Providing services through a holistic, relationship-based model allows the team to build a community around the individual and family. Building strong relationships with our community organizations ensures that patients are cared for throughout their healthcare journey, not only while at NH.



As we continue on this journey to improve the care experience alongside Indigenous peoples we are committed to focusing our attention on creating inclusive spaces and opportunities at NH. We will continue to partner with the Indigenous community and listen to opportunities and ways we can engage and welcome patients and families to help co-design a model of engagement that works for them and helps to address disparities and inequities in healthcare. Not only inviting them to collaborate on existing initiatives and committee structures, but also listening to ways that work best for Indigenous peoples. NH will make a rigorous and concerted effort to continue to create safe spaces for the voices of Indigenous patients and families to be heard when it comes to their healthcare journey at NH.

SUMMARY

Looking forward, we are excited to further explore growth of our NHEN to ensure that our Patient Partners truly reflect the diverse perspectives of the community we serve. In addition, working in partnership with our Indigenous Health Services and Reconciliation team, we will begin exploring culturally safe and authentic ways of welcoming patients, families, and community members who identify as Indigenous to engage with the NHEN on initiatives. We strive to ensure we provide an environment that offers culturally sensitive care that is open, responsive, and engaged with the Indigenous community.

While this report is merely a snapshot of some of the incredible contributions from the NHEN over the past four years, it is also a celebration of the amazing journey to date and provides a foundation for moving forward in new and innovative ways to improve the patient and family experience.



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