

December 9, 2020

Dear Community,

This is an open letter to communicate to you our deep, continued commitment to Indigenous Health in Indigenous Hands and to share how we have been working hard to ensure that the Waterloo Wellington Indigenous Healing and Wellness Program (IHWP) finds its rightful place within an Indigenous-led and Indigenous-governed organization.

On behalf of the Guelph CHC Board of Directors and the IHWP Advisory Circle, we are excited to announce that the oversight and leadership of the IHWP will be transitioning to the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre. This transition will take place effective December 15, 2020 and is informed by a comprehensive Indigenous-led consultant review completed by INDSight, which recommended that the program would be best-served within an existing Aboriginal Health Access Centre.

With *deep gratitude* the Guelph CHC wishes to thank the IHWP staff, volunteers and community members who have entrusted the stewardship of the IHWP to our organization over the last three years.

Below is a timeline summary of actions and commitments that lead to this transition.

Background

- In the fall of 2017, the Board of Directors of the Alliance for Healthier Communities (our provincial association), along with their Executive Leaders Network, passed unanimous resolutions committing to transition existing Indigenous-funded health programs into the hands of Indigenous-governed health organizations.
- This commitment was tabled again at the Alliance for Healthier Communities' Annual General Meeting in June 2019, where the following motion was unanimously supported:

"Be It Resolved that the Alliance for Healthier Communities supports the position that Indigenous health care be planned, designed, developed, delivered and evaluated by Indigenous governed organizations, and urges member centres to work in a manner that honours and respects Indigenous voice, leaders and governance frameworks and that exemplifies authentic allied relationships."

- Alongside our full commitment to these respective resolutions, Guelph CHC and the IHWP Manager Jennifer Antler Menominee engaged in a series of consultations to inform our next steps, including with the provincial Indigenous Primary Care Council, Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) leadership and leadership from our surrounding Aboriginal Health Access Centres.
- In September of 2019, the Board of the Directors of the Guelph CHC met together with the IHWP Advisory Circle. At this gathering, the groups agreed that the Waterloo Wellington Indigenous communities would be best served if the Indigenous Healing and Wellness Program were delivered within an Indigenous-led organization. Guided by this shared agreement, the Guelph CHC Board and the Advisory Circle agreed to engage an Indigenous consultant to inform and guide bringing this decision to a reality.
- Between November 2019 and January 2020, INDSight Consulting conducted a comprehensive review of all Indigenous-governed health and community service organizations in the surrounding areas, with a view for which organizations were best-positioned to host the IHWP.
- Findings of the INDSight review were presented to the Advisory Council in January 2020, where it was agreed that transitioning the program to a surrounding Aboriginal Health Access Centre (AHAC) would best meet the needs of the community, and the program as a whole.
- Over the spring and summer of 2020, dialogues with Hamilton and London-based AHACs took place, and by September 2020, there was agreement by all parties that a program transfer be initiated with the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre.
- Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre is an organization with an incredibly strong provincial reputation for Indigenous health care delivery, with extensive experience in providing comprehensive community-based Indigenous primary health care services, including healing and wellness, across Southwestern Ontario.

What's Next

- As the IHWP program transitions to Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre over the coming months, they will assume accountability and oversight for IHWP funding, performance, staffing and program delivery.
- During this transition, all existing IHWP staff positions will transition to be employees of Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre. Additionally, current program delivery will remain status quo throughout the transition, honouring that current program and services have been designed guided by current local community needs.

- The IHWP's Advisory Circle who are local Indigenous leaders that have provided continual leadership, oversight and guidance on the program's community engagement approaches, strategic planning, and program design and delivery - will continue to play a guiding leadership role during the transition. Strategies to enhance community engagement, recruitment and retention will be a key priority of Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre once the transition has been completed.
- Following the transition, re-engagement and consultation with the Indigenous community members in Waterloo Wellington will be undertaken, with a goal of updating community needs, potential for program expansion and site locations.

In Closing

- The Boards, leadership and staff of the Guelph CHC and Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre, alongside the IHWP Advisory Circle, fully support the voluntary transition of **Indigenous Health to Indigenous Hands** – by way of this voluntary program transfer from Guelph CHC to Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre.
- We are excited about the Indigenous self-determination that this transition will enable, and are hopeful about the future growth opportunities that may be on the horizon as a result of this transition.
- At the Guelph CHC, we remain fully committed to a seamless transition process of the IHWP. We also remain committed to a deep and lasting partnership with Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre and all surrounding local Indigenous originations, as we work together to support the health and well-being of the Indigenous communities we serve.

In partnership,



Raechelle Devereaux
Chief Executive Officer
Guelph CHC