

HealthLink

Huron Perth Health Link

Let's Make Healthy Change Happen

What is a Health Link?

In December 2012, Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long Term Care announced a new provincial initiative – Health Links with 19 Early Adopter Health Links approved to proceed. The South West LHIN has one early adopter, the Huron Perth Health Link.

Minister Matthews noted that,

“Health Links will break down barriers for Ontarians, making access to health care easier and less complicated. By encouraging local health providers to work together to co-ordinate care for individual patients, we’re ensuring our most vulnerable patients – seniors and those with complex conditions – get the care they need and don’t fall between the cracks.”

A key driver behind Health Links is research showing that the top 5% of the population, who have a high utilization rate of the health system, consume over 40% of the health system dollars. While some of these patients have conditions that require expensive care, the data shows that multiple providers care for many patients where little or no information is shared among the providers. This type of fragmented care leads to confusion for the patient and results in increased emergency room visits and increased hospitalizations.

The Health Link initiative is aimed at breaking down the silos of care. It is about creating an environment where traditional and non-traditional health care partners come together and develop a more coordinated approach to supporting those individuals who are frequent users of the health system. Health Links will develop strategies to keep care in the community whenever possible and away from unnecessary emergency rooms and hospitals visits. These are the patients who are ‘falling through the cracks’. Identifying these individuals and working with all the agencies who are now providing or who could be providing wrap around services to keep these patients safe and well in their homes is a critical activity for Health Links.

Some of the key outcomes for Health Links will be:

- Improve access to family care for seniors and patients with complex conditions
- Reduce avoidable emergency room visits
- Reduce unnecessary re-admissions to hospitals
- Reduce time for referral from primary care to specialists
- Improve the patient’s experience during their journey through the health care system

Health Links is a health system transformation initiative with a strong focus on improving the coordination of care between primary health care and other sectors of the health care system. For many people, primary care is the first point of contact with the health system; so strengthening its connections to the broader health and social service systems is transformation path to improve coordination of care. Full engagement of primary care physicians is a critical success factor for Health Links. While Health Links will seek to coordinate care across the health system, the nexus for the care coordination is through primary care physicians and their team.

Huron Perth Health Link

The lead agency for the Huron Perth Health LINK (HPHL) is responsible for coordinating the planning, development and implementation of the Health Link business plan along with partner agencies. While work continues on engaging health and social service agencies within Huron and Perth counties, the inaugural Steering Committee consists of representatives from the South West LHIN, primary care, hospitals, SouthWest CCAC, community support services, mental health and addictions, community mental health, and health units. The HPHL is accountable to the South West LHIN.

HPHL is using a Quality Improvement lens in the creation of its vision and its approach to planning. Within this context, the initial population focus will be frail seniors and adults with COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) and CHF (chronic heart failure). The task before the HPHL is to identify the individual patients within these populations and work with partner organizations to develop and implement individualized care plans that wrap around appropriate services to ensure that these individuals remain safe and well within their home environments.

Inherent to the success of Health Links will be the ability of the partner health providers to:

- share patient information across the partner organizations;
- develop, share, and update coordinated care plans electronically and in real time; and
- engage the patient and family in the development of their care plans.

A HPHL planning workshop took place February 4, 2013. Partners identified a number of gaps in care delivery within and between their organizations. These gaps were characterized as “commitments for change” initiatives and categorized into 5 high level areas for improvement:

- Timely access to care
- Coordinated care plans
- Access to shared information
- Standardized care delivery
- Patient and caregiver education

In addition, three foundational enablers were identified as supporting all areas for health system improvement:

- Culture change within organizations– this will require organizations to adopt new ways to deliver care in a coordinated fashion where the current fragmented approach to care delivery no longer has a place.
- Human resources – the HPHL partners need to build internal capacity to support the development and implementation of coordinated health system planning.
- Enabling technologies – information technology will be a game changer in supporting information sharing among all partner organizations and in providing real time support and monitoring to ensure the right care is provided by the right provider in the right place.

Patient centred focus

A critical success factor for the HPHL is keeping the patient at the centre of all of our activities. What this means is that the patient and his family have a role to play in the development of the care plan and its ongoing implementation..

An important part of the HPHL structure is a Patient and Caregiver Panel, which will be an influential voice in helping to inform the progress of the Health Link. This panel will be made up of patients and their families and will be a critical component to the governance structure for the HPHL

Having a Patient and Caregiver Panel will strengthen the stakeholder engagement plan. This panel will ensure that the needs of the patient and their families remain at the core of planning initiatives. Giving voice to the patient experience in their health journey is the ultimate in quality improvement.

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