

# October Newsletter

Oct. 11



*Sept. 21 panel from left to right: Dr. Jaclyn Vanek, Jonathan Bennett, Dr. Andrea Zukowski, and Dr. John Beamish*

## Local Doctors Speak Out: What Peterborough Needs

With healthcare funding announcements expected from the Province this fall, three family doctors spoke out about what they see is needed in Peterborough at a ‘fireside chat’ on September 21, 2023.

On a moderated panel at the local library, hosted by the Jonathan Bennett, Board Chair of the newly formed [Peterborough Community Health Centre \(CHC\)](#), the three physicians discussed the current challenges and possible solutions facing Peterborough’s healthcare system.

**“If Peterborough had a CHC, I would definitely want to stay here and practice.” — Dr. Andrea Zukowski**

“If we want to prevent overwhelm at our emergency department and physician burnout in Peterborough, then we need a model that adequately supports complex patients and health care providers. A CHC is that model. It confounds me why Peterborough doesn’t have one,” said Dr John Beamish, who practiced family medicine for over four decades before retiring in this past spring.

The number of people in Peterborough without primary healthcare has swelled to an estimated 20,000 as the population has grown and physicians have retired. All three doctors spoke to this issue, and the pressures it creates.

### **What Newer Graduating Doctors Want**

Since graduating medical school seven years ago, Dr. Jaclyn Vanek has worked part time at the Rapid Access to Addiction Medicine Clinic in Peterborough. However, she travels elsewhere in the province to provide primary healthcare in a salaried model. She has been a strong proponent of the Peterborough CHC to attract doctors who could work part time at a CHC and fill other vital roles such as working in the emergency department. She told the audience, “I truly believe we will be able to fill these CHC positions. If we can get a CHC funded, they will come.”

### **Recruiting Doctors: CHC Offers a New Option, and Hope**

Peterborough’s historical struggle to recruit doctors has been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic and a general trend of fewer doctors opting to practice traditional family medicine. The doctors on the panel are concerned that without a CHC Peterborough is less equipped than other communities to recruit new physicians.

There are 101 CHC’s spread across the province. Peterborough has always been without one.

“It’s easy to commit to work in a CHC because it offers diversity of work, and work life balance,” said Dr. Vanek. “I don’t want to be bogged down running my own businesses and feel locked into doing something past when I want to retire—which is what we’re seeing locally.”

Dr. Beamish agreed. Traditional family practice models that require physicians to run their own businesses and bill for services are increasingly unattractive to newer grads.

“The Fee for service model is a dinosaur heading to the tar pits,” he said. “No one in five to ten years is going to want to practice this way. And it’s what we have in Peterborough. Unless we develop a diversity of models, we will be bereft of family physicians.”

Dr. Andrea Zukowski, who is completing her second year of a family residency in Peterborough, added, “If Peterborough had a CHC, I would definitely want to stay here and practice.”

Zukowski has practiced at the CHC in Ottawa and appreciated the team environment there. She spoke of seeing, first-hand, how less administration and better access to benefits, supports workplace wellness for healthcare providers.

The Province is expected to announce new funding for inter-professional primary health care teams. The Peterborough CHC is seeking \$8.2 million to employ over 40 healthcare providers serving 6,000 complex patients.

When asked what they might say to decision makers, Dr. Vanek responded, “We are losing doctors [in Peterborough] because we don’t have this. I have a colleague who lives here and commutes to the CHC in Lindsay. I work elsewhere as well. We are all losing out without this and it’s not fair to our community.”

Dr. Beamish agreed, adding, “The CHC model is available in many other communities. It’s proven. It delivers. Peterborough’s been missed before. This is not the first ask. It’s our turn.”

## **Indigenous Health in Indigenous Hands**

As a community with three First Nations in the area and a significant Métis and urban Indigenous population, providing culturally safer care must be central to the Peterborough CHC’s mandate.

The Peterborough CHC is expressly committed to Indigenous Health in Indigenous Hands. This means that:

Indigenous health care for rural, remote and urban must be planned, designed, developed, delivered, and evaluated by Indigenous governed organizations. This includes honouring and respecting Indigenous voices, leadership, governance frameworks, and seeking out authentic relationships. Indigenous knowledge systems will be recognized - Indigenous teachings, world views, and lived experience must be valued sources of evidence and expertise. [Ontario Health document](#), Pg 11

The Peterborough CHC is engaging in conversations with First Nations, Métis, and local Indigenous-led organizations to determine how to proceed in a way that fills the evident need for culturally safer primary health care for Indigenous people and aligns with the tenet of Indigenous Health in Indigenous Hands.

In early June, the Peterborough CHC hosted a gathering with eight representatives from four Indigenous-led organizations, the Métis Nation of Ontario Peterborough and District Wapiti Métis Council, and Hiawatha First Nation. This discussion affirmed our commitment to having cultural safety and a focus on Indigenous health as being imbued throughout the CHC, not as an added priority population. The Peterborough CHC Board is meeting with local First Nations Councils, the Métis Nation of Ontario Peterborough and District Wapiti Métis Council, and the boards of urban Indigenous organizations to learn more about a good path forward.

At this time, there is a common commitment to continue the conversations about how the Peterborough CHC can develop to ensure the needs of Indigenous patients are considered at every level of the organization. We will continue to engage to build a stronger understanding of the path forward for local delivery of Indigenous primary health care, as determined by local Indigenous leaders.