

WE-SPARK HEALTH INSTITUTE OFFICIALLY LAUNCHES

Windsor-Essex Healthcare and Academic Institutions Enter into Historic Agreement

WINDSOR ON, March 9, 2020 — Four Windsor-Essex institutions have formally entered into an agreement today, officially launching a regional health institute.

The newly branded WE-SPARK Health Institute will bring together and elevate health research strengths from across the Windsor-Essex region and beyond to establish research pipelines that address regional health issues, advance innovation and technology, and drive outcomes that support healthier communities.

Lisa Porter, Executive Director of WE-SPARK Health Institute and Professor, Biomedical Sciences, University of Windsor expressed her excitement with moving forward with an initiative that has been in the works for a decade: “We are in a unique position in Windsor to come together and raise the bar for innovation, training and healthcare delivery that directly impacts the health of our community.”

“The college is looking forward to very extensive participation in this valuable new endeavour,” said St. Clair College President Patti France. “It is the most far-reaching and far-sighted collaboration we’ve had in the health field during our decades-long partnerships with the university, the hospitals, and a number of local clinics, agencies and medical practitioners. Our professors are looking forward to their expanded research role, and it opens up a whole new vista of knowledge and experience for our students.”

Robert Gordon, President and Vice-Chancellor at the University of Windsor adds: “We are thrilled to be part of this innovative health initiative that will support our regional commitment to vibrant, healthy and resilient communities throughout Windsor-Essex. I truly believe that the training opportunities, research outcomes and health benefits of WE-SPARK will demonstrate the impact and need for partnerships throughout our region”.

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“Today, patients live longer because of advancements stemming from research” adds Janice Kaffer, President and CEO, Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare. “Partnerships are key to driving quality improvement and ensuring we are responsive to the needs of our patients. We are excited to build and strengthen our current research program by working in collaboration with the University of Windsor, St. Clair College and Windsor Regional Hospital to better serve the patients in our region.”

“Research and Education are among the main drivers of the new Windsor-Essex Hospitals System. Through this unique partnership we have a chance to think big, build collaboration into the new system and position the region as a leader in medical research. This will have a huge impact on our patients and improve our ability to recruit and retain top physicians, professional healthcare staff and medical leaders”, states David Musyj, President and CEO, Windsor Regional Hospital.

Research areas will include cancer, brain health and neuroscience, sexual health, rehabilitation, population health, and more.

Officials from Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare, University of Windsor, Windsor Regional Hospital and St. Clair College signed the Memorandum of Understanding during a launch celebration at the Windsor Club on March 9, 2020.

WE-SPARK Health Institute is collaboration between the University of Windsor, Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare, St. Clair College, and Windsor Regional Hospital. Its mission is to enhance the health, well-being and care of people through transformative research and knowledge translation, creating a thriving and engaged research community driving enhancements in health.

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BACKGROUND

In March 2009, stakeholders from the Windsor-Essex region formed a steering committee to begin exploring opportunities for enhancing regional health research capacity. This multi-stakeholder committee engaged a firm to assess the feasibility of establishing a health research institute. The study defined Windsor's key advantages and strengths in health research, and assessed existing research capacity and needs to support growth and expansion. The study concluded that there was a significant appetite and unexploited opportunity for a collaborative and integrative health research enterprise in Windsor-Essex.

The report recommended:

- Expanding health research with translational components that bring the latest, most cutting-edge clinical research, health care devices, diagnostics and treatments to patients in Windsor-Essex
- Enhancing linkages and interaction among university and clinical researchers, locally and regionally
- A world-class research space that supports integration, collaboration and translation of research and dissemination of knowledge
- Increasing access to state-of-the-art resources dedicated to research, including facilities, equipment and personnel.
- Managing research processes/platforms to support local research initiatives
- Establishing a critical research mass to attract large funding envelopes from government to support the recruitment of high quality researchers, high impact research projects and competitive research infrastructure
- Strengthening the local economy through diversification by establishing a research knowledge base in Windsor-Essex

Following a series of regional visioning days and consultations spanning a decade, in the Fall of 2018 an Executive Committee was established and tasked with putting plans into action, including creating a proposal for a new health institute. The institute would consist of four partners: The University of Windsor, Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare (HDGH), St. Clair College, and Windsor Regional Hospital (WRH). An application was submitted and was passed by the University of Windsor Senate in May, 2019.

Mission

Enhance the health, well-being and care of people through transformative research and knowledge translation.

Vision

A thriving and engaged research community driving advancements in health.

Priorities

1. Advance a research scope and focus defining competitive research niches rooted in excellence;
2. Form globally recognized, multi-disciplinary networks of scientists, clinicians and educators;
3. Provide health research resources, including infrastructure, equipment, seed funding and personnel, to accelerate research progress;
4. Incorporate program planning and evaluation to ensure that outcomes are producing efficiencies in the healthcare system;
5. Support novel training opportunities and programs;
6. Develop a platform that will attract high quality academics and health care professionals;
7. Engage and empower the Windsor–Essex community through public education and outreach activities; and
8. Ensure the Institute's long term sustainability

The health institute will mobilize existing expertise resident in the four partner institutions and effectively leverage available resources from areas of strength. Examples of these are listed below:

Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare. HDGH is a unique community hospital offering services in Mental Health & Addictions; Rehabilitative Care; Complex Medical and Palliative Care; and Children and Youth Mental Health. HDGH has designated 2.5 full-time employees to advance research efforts, and has an established MOU with the University of Windsor in this area. Research is a strategic priority of HDGH focused on Centres of Excellence in Mental Health and Rehabilitative Care Evaluation research, and will be a key driver of clinical translational research in the region. This area will also have strong ties to the field of social justice, of which Windsor has much strength.

St. Clair College. St. Clair College is home to one of the largest number of graduates in Health Science-related programs in Ontario. Each of these programs provides placement opportunities to ensure practical training to provide students with work-ready skills. These programs are also supported by the department of Applied Research and Development, in order to advance research in their respective fields and collaborate with community partners. Programs directly involved in health research include: Nursing, Social Service Worker – Gerontology, Autism and Behavioural Science, Biomedical Engineering Technology, Educational Support, Occupational Therapist Assistant/Physiotherapist Assistant, Data Analytics, and Paramedic. These programs address research issues related to community health inequities, novel technology to advance opportunities for healthcare delivery and monitoring, and pedagogy, as a means to continuously improve student training opportunities for career-readiness.

Windsor Regional Hospital. WRH is the 11th largest hospital in the Province of Ontario and the 3rd largest community teaching hospital. WRH is the regional provider of advanced care in: regional cancer services, complex trauma, renal dialysis, cardiac care, stroke & neurosurgery, intensive care, acute mental health, family birthing centre, neonatal intensive care, and paediatric services. WRH has research strengths in clinical trials with 5 full-time Clinical Research Associates. Cancer and respiratory research are the current strengths with the potential to expand into nephrology, cardiovascular and sexual health in the near future.

University of Windsor. The University of Windsor has a large number of health focused faculty with funding from local, provincial and national agencies with decades of research experience and an Office of Research and Innovation Services (ORIS) which provides research support to faculty and liaisons between faculty and funding organizations. There are several existing and emerging areas of strength including cancer, the understanding of neurosciences, psychology, nursing, ergonomics, and human kinetics that impact the health of society. There are opportunities to expand in the understanding of how our daily environments (occupational, indoor and outdoor, sensory, etc.) impact human health and the socio-economic determinants of health (including income, ethnicity, religion, gender). These areas will serve as a launching point for many exciting research questions related to the overall epidemiology of the region and the social and environmental impacts related to local and regional health outcomes.

The University of Windsor supports several institutes and groups which will provide rich partnerships with the WE-SPARK Health Institute including: Cross Border Institute (CBI), Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research (GLIER), Windsor Cancer Research Group (WCRG), World Health Innovation Network (WIN), Windsor Essex Compassion Care Community (WECCC), Centre for Human Performance and Health and the Institute for Diagnostic Imaging Research (IDIR). The University also has expertise in materials science and engineering, law, education and innovation/business development that offer novel opportunities for new areas of health to be developed.

By integrating health research strengths, expertise, infrastructure and capacity through the Windsor-Essex Region we can build and support existing areas of strength and move into currently underserved areas to better support the needs of our region.

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To learn more about WE-SPARK Health Institute, visit:

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