



Kawartha Lakes healthcare providers are joining forces to meet the many challenges of COVID-19

Five creative solutions and new ways of working together have emerged as a result of the unique situations health care providers and social agencies are faced with during COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented health challenges for residents of Kawartha Lakes.



To meet physical, mental and emotional needs in the community, there has been a coordinated response across countless healthcare and social support organizations. **Teamwork, collaboration and creativity** are common themes in the ways many providers have responded to ensure needs are met.

Woven throughout these experiences is a thread of **caring and dedication** to the

people served across Kawartha Lakes.

1. Teamwork helps win the battle against the virus

Roles and responsibilities of various health care partners have become blurred at times in order to meet new challenges, often resulting in daily changes to staff and patient protocol.

Ross Memorial Hospital's (<https://rmh.org/>) President and CEO, Kelly Isfan, shares:

"Teamwork can be seen on many fronts:

- Paramedics are working at the COVID-19 assessment centre and providing in-home swabbing to people who cannot leave their homes.
- The infectious disease control team from the hospital is providing mentoring and support to long-term care facilities dealing with outbreaks.
- The Health Unit is taking the lead on local COVID-19 disease surveillance; management and contact tracing, as well as communication with community partners and the public.
- Fleming College has provided accommodations for our essential workers.

We're grateful to everyone for staying home for us and to those who are making and donating masks and other equipment. It's all working and we hope to soon ramp up so we can safely offer more services to the community."



Kelly Isfan,
President and CEO,
Ross Memorial Hospital



Sara Johnston,
Deputy Chief, Professional Standards,
Kawartha Lakes Paramedics

Paramedics provide in-home testing

[Kawartha Lakes Paramedic Service \(/en/ambulance-and-paramedic-service.aspx\)](/en/ambulance-and-paramedic-service.aspx) is teamed up with the Ross Memorial Hospital and has provided **in-home testing for over 100 people** who are unable to get to the drive-thru assessment centre. Sara Johnston, Deputy Chief, Professional Standards, Kawartha Lakes Paramedics explains, "This helps keep potentially ill people away from the hospital and clinics, keeping others protected. We've also assisted the Ross in **testing over 1500 staff and residents in long term care, retirement homes, child care centres and other congregate settings**. We've been helping out neighbouring hospitals such as Minden and Port Perry, that aren't accepting patients during COVID-19, by transporting directly to the Ross. And along the way, together we've worked out new safety protocols for transferring patients outside the hospital, lowering the risk of spread."

Pinecrest Nursing Home first and hardest hit

Administrator Mary Carr describes how the health care community stepped in to support the staff and residents. "With 28 staff testing positive, we needed support. We are grateful to the Ministries of Health and of Long Term Care, Extendicare, our partners at Ross Memorial and all the new and temporary staff members who offered resources or joined our team during this outbreak to ensure that we could continue providing high quality care to our residents during this trying time."

2. The ability to adapt to rapid changes, over the course of 10 weeks, has been our greatest weapon against the virus

Speed and agility in the face of constant change has enabled our community to keep the virus at bay. Although sadly, the community has seen 32 COVID-19 related deaths, we have less than half the provincial average of positive cases.

Despite one brief COVID-19 outbreak, the Ross Memorial Hospital has maintained available beds and remains well equipped to serve the needs of Kawartha Lakes and surrounding area. Quick action by Veronica Nelson, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the Ross, resulted in much needed Personal Protective Equipment being shared with Paramedics as supplies ran low.

“Our biggest challenge and concern has been PPE to keep our Paramedics safe. A single 911 call can involve up to four sets of personal equipment, which we didn’t have available at the onset of this pandemic. We can’t thank the public enough for pitching in. Local stores literally emptied their shelves for us. As time went on, Veronica has scoured the world over to find PPE and share it with open arms,” comments Andrew Rafton, Chief, Kawartha Lakes Paramedics.

The Haliburton, Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit (<https://www.hkpr.on.ca/>), as the lead local agency during a pandemic, has led the charge on local COVID-19 disease surveillance, case management and contact tracing. Amid ever-changing guidelines, public health staff have kept health care partners informed throughout the pandemic. “We are appreciative of the media and partners such as the City for their help to ensure the latest guidelines are being shared with the public. **The correct information is one of our best tools in this battle,**” says Dr. Lynn Noseworthy Medical Officer of Health for the HKPR District Health Unit.



Staying home is an inconvenience for many; for others it's isolating, stressful or impossible.

3. Filling a gap for personal contact

Sheila Carron, Registered Nurse at the Ross, works in the Community Response Program with KLPS and OPP ensuring people are connected to the resources they need. She notes, "We've seen an increase of requests from agencies such as the Children's Aid Society, Canadian Mental Health Association and Women's Resources who need help with face to face visits. Since people can't meet in person with their therapists and support workers, they need to find other ways of getting help. **Some people are really struggling with the isolation. So we've been checking in on people we wouldn't normally see to make sure they're looked after.**"

The Situation Table, a collective group of healthcare, housing, social agencies and first responders that usually meet monthly, has met virtually during COVID-19 to solve challenges for people in crisis. Carron continues, "Often they need a cell phone. Sometimes they need food, especially if they live rurally. **It was especially thoughtful of Kawartha Lakes Food Source (<https://kawarthalakesfoodsource.com/>) to make up bags of food we could have in our vehicles for when we meet someone in need.**"

Many services have gone virtual, but Carron explains that her work continues to be personal. "Myself and another nurse administer medications to people who would normally come to the hospital to receive injections. To be safer for everyone, we've been going to their homes."

COVID-19 has driven home how important social contact is for us all, but especially for those with mental illness. Getting connected to a therapist by phone can be more challenging than you might think. For some, even access to a cell phone is the first hurdle. For others, their home environment doesn't allow for a meaningful connection with others. The teamwork of various social agencies across our community is playing an important role to help fill the gaps," comments Donna Rogers, Executive Director of Fourcast (<http://www.fourcast.ca/>), a community based addiction treatment provider.



4. Meeting the needs of transportation, shopping and more



Barb Mildon, CEO, Community Care City of Kawartha Lakes (<https://www.ccckl.ca/>) says, "Many of our programs successfully evolved from in-person services to virtual groups, including social wellness and grief support. We maintained primary care services through a combination of virtual and in-person visits. This included essential medical transportation to ensure individuals safely got to their dialysis, cancer care treatments and offered new services to assist isolated seniors and

others including grocery shopping and in-home respite. **Demand for our Meals on Wheels** (<https://www.ccckl.ca/services/nutrition/hot-meal-delivery/>) **program has grown by over 25% during the pandemic."**

5. Rapid re-housing of 50 individuals facing homelessness

Nicole Bryant, Shelter Manager for [A Place Called Home \(APCH\)](#)

(<http://www.lindsaymarkathon.com/>) describes how teamwork moves mountains, “I’m really impressed with the City’s ability to work with us and respond immediately. We were weeks ahead of any other municipality I’ve been in contact with as far as securing housing for those facing homelessness. We got everyone out of the shelter and into temporary housing that was best for everyone’s safety and comfort. It’s pretty difficult to self-isolate in a shared accommodation like a shelter.”

Bryant describes a similar sharing or blending of roles between APCH, the City’s Human Services staff and the Health Unit. “We meet every other day to discuss what needs to be done. It’s been amazing to be part of a team where everyone has been willing to pivot and adjust really quickly to changing circumstances.”

This teamwork has resulted in a safe place for more than 50 individuals from across Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton County who wouldn’t otherwise have been able to social distance or control their own safety. Since transportation is a challenge, they are also supported by in-home COVID-19 testing by Paramedics.

Taking on new roles and thinking creatively to solve challenges

A new challenge for **A Place Called Home** was providing food to those members of our community who normally ate at the shelter or depended on friends for meals. Before long, [Charmin Wholesome Food Catering](#) (<http://charminswholesomefoods.ca/>) helped with prepared frozen foods to ensure a hot daily meal.

The next goal is to find secure homes for these individuals and families. Hope Lee, Housing Manager for the City of Kawartha Lakes, has a [creative approach to incentivize landlords](#) (</en/news/housing-services-seeks-help-from-landlords-during-covid-19-with-new-rapid-re-housing-program.aspx>). Through the Social Services Relief Fund, landlords with apartments are guaranteed rent for 3 months’ pre-paid rent, \$500 to help prepare the unit, COVID-19 screening prior to move-in and landlord support through Affordable Housing Program Coordinator, who will regularly check-in to see how the tenancy is going.

“We’re seeing landlords coming forward, and I commend them for doing this. We’re still most in need of bachelor and one-bedroom apartments. We’re working to provide long-term housing for close to 100 people who are actively homeless in Kawartha Lakes and the County of Haliburton. The majority are single, and there are nearly 20 families and several seniors, youth and couples.”

Lee continues, “Existing partnerships have taken on a new role during the

pandemic. PARN, our community's AIDS resource network, is now doing more outreach for delivering harm reduction supplies and needle collection than ever before. The Health Unit is helping to guide the way forward, and A Place Called Home has been stretching and adapting to many rapid changes. We often don't realize how hard it is for some people who don't have a safe space to self isolate."

Next hurdles to overcome include increased testing and reopening

In the coming days and weeks, our healthcare providers, social service agencies and community partners will be challenged to continue finding creative solutions and working together as we move toward a "newer" normal.

Under the Province's new strategy announced May 27 (<https://files.ontario.ca/moh-covid-19-protecting-ontarians-through-enhanced-testing-en-2020-05-29.pdf>), there will be expanded testing for General public, frontline workers, first responders and workplaces.

As we develop new safety protocols for meeting face-to-face, and as businesses and healthcare providers open their doors, we will look to these our local health care leaders to continue to light the way forward.

The following individuals are willing to provide media interviews:

Public Health

Dr. Lynn Noseworthy, Medical Officer of Health, HKPR District Health Unit

Kawartha Lakes Paramedics

Andrew Rafton, Chief

Sara Johnston, Deputy Chief, Professional Standards

Ross Memorial Hospital

Kelly Isfan, President and CEO

Sheila Carron, Registered Nurse, Community Response Program with KLPS and OPP

Social Supports

Donna Rogers, Executive Director, Fourcast

Nicole Bryant, Shelter Manager, A Place Called Home

Hope Lee, Housing Manager, City of Kawartha Lakes Human Services

Barb Mildren, Community Care Health and Care Network

Long term care

Mary Carr, Administrator, Pinecrest Nursing Home

Thank you to the following for sharing their stories and digital assets:

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