

Key Messages

- Access to quality health care for residents of rural, remote and northern communities in Ontario is a critical issue. Rural populations, in general, experience a higher burden of illness and decreased access to health care services than their urban counterparts.
- In Northern Ontario, access is a major challenge. Travelling distance and unpredictable weather conditions can make accessing timely care very difficult.
- In rural and northern communities, the hospital is the hub of health care, providing a broad and comprehensive range of services to meet the needs of the area's patients.
- Small, rural and northern hospitals face not only the pressures of having a shortage of resources, but they also work in an environment of higher demand where people are more sick, and require more services.
- Northern hospitals tend to be smaller in size and further apart. As a result, they may experience certain difficulties achieving clinical efficiencies and may also lack the service volumes to assure the ongoing viability of certain programs.
- The needs of rural communities are not limited to funding; challenges recruiting and retaining medical professionals in concert with program reductions can limit access to service.
- Small, rural and northern hospitals are committed to working together with the Ontario Hospital Association and with the government to help improve access to health care, and ensure an integrated, coordinated system of hospitals and health care providers.