



**PORT COLBORNE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

May 31, 2023

### **Statement from Port Colborne Mayor Bill Steele**

**PORT COLBORNE, ON** – Earlier today, Niagara Health announced it would be reducing hours at the Port Colborne and Fort Erie Urgent Care Centres due to a physician shortage. Both centres will be reduced from a 24-hour per day service down to 12 hours per day, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. beginning July 5, 2023.

While I understand the challenges Niagara Health and other health systems across Canada are facing, I am disappointed and deeply concerned that these changes put Port Colborne residents at a disadvantage to other residents in the Niagara region. I've been in regular contact with Mayor Redekop in Fort Erie to discuss the difficulties residents in our communities face when trying to access reliable health services.

Port Colborne has approximately 10,000 residents without a family doctor. Their first point of healthcare contact is with an Urgent Care Centre or Emergency Department. Until we can provide residents with access to family doctors or local solutions to meet their health service needs, they will continue to need local Urgent Care Centres, or they will continue to overload our Emergency Departments elsewhere in Niagara.

I recognize that Niagara Health is aiming to deliver the safest and most effective healthcare for residents across all of Niagara. Making changes to their healthcare delivery model is inevitable as healthcare continues to experience a transformation and health human resource challenges continue to mount. That said, I feel it is essential for Niagara Health and the Province of Ontario to continue prioritizing access for quality healthcare for residents across the entire Niagara region – not just those residents close to the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls general hospitals.

While Port Colborne and Fort Erie Urgent Care Centres do not receive a high number of patients during the evening hours, I still believe access to this service is important. Last year, Port Colborne's Urgent Care Centre received an average of four patients per night.

It's important for residents in our communities to continue to have access to quality healthcare close to home. Along with our Port Colborne Health Services Working Group and City Council, we are working hard to bring more community-based healthcare resources and new family physicians to Port Colborne to ensure our residents have access to the care they need.

Port Colborne does have a number of mobile health services, such as a mobile dental clinic and mobile mammograms. Council and I will continue pursuing and attracting more of these community-based services for the benefit of our residents.

The Provincial government and Niagara Health need to step up and meet the needs of residents, not remove more and more necessary services. It is time for them to take meaningful action to address the worsening crisis. The City of Port Colborne and City Council are committed to fighting for healthcare services that our residents need and deserve.

I am adamant that Niagara Health keep this service interruption to a minimum and restore 24-hour coverage at both the Port Colborne and Fort Erie Urgent Care Centres as soon as possible.

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