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## MEDIA RELEASE

*For Immediate Release*

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### *Rural Healthcare Review is Good News*

A Northern and Rural Panel to establish province-wide policy for the delivery of health services in rural and remote communities is being established by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC). "This is excellent news; rural health care delivery is unique, it requires a rural approach," Mike Mazza, CEO of the Middlesex Hospital Alliance, says.

David Caplan, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, made the announcement last Monday during Question Period. "I recognize the challenges that rural and northern communities face and I want you to know that our government is committed to examining the issues and providing a framework to support northern and rural communities. As part of the first stage I'm pleased to inform the member and the House that our government will establish a northern and rural panel to review the activities across the province. It will provide recommendations to identify unique needs. It will coordinate targets to be achieved through investments. And it will examine the existing programs and the supports that we have already put in place and the services targeted to northern and rural Ontario. I know this panel will help us to do the right thing for rural and northern Ontario residents and I look forward to seeing its recommendations."

"The announcement of a Northern and Rural Panel is a major breakthrough. It is an opportunity to ensure that population health needs and the use of evidence and leading practices are commonly applied to health system planning and decision-making affecting rural and northern communities across the Province of Ontario," Tom Closson, President and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA), who communicated the news through his regular e-letter to Ontario hospitals, says. The OHA has its own Working Group focused on rural and northern health and Closson says that the OHA anticipates directing this group's work to participate in the Ministry-lead initiative.

A focus on the re-investment of existing resources in rural areas will improve health care delivery in these areas, Mazza says. “It makes sense for the government to ensure an integrated continuum of care exists in rural Ontario, otherwise patients will simply get bumped up the line to larger urban centres – and that *will* be more expensive for the government – for all of us.”

Mazza notes that the number of beds in a hospital is often the standard by which a hospital’s size, and therefore importance in the healthcare system is judged. “It is a false standard and increasingly so. Everywhere hospital patient volumes are dropping, systems have changed and we are developing more and more innovative outpatient strategies. We all need to be involved in creating sustainable and deliverable rural health care.”