

Local Health Integration Networks: Building a True System

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LHIN Liaison Branch

If the evolution of Local Health Integration Networks can be seen as a journey, then it is one that every once in a while must be taken step by step. That's the view of Carrie Hayward, Director of the LHIN Liaison Branch (LLB), whose mandate is to identify, design and implement the new processes and structures that will support the ministry's working relationship with LHINs. When you strip away that bureaucratic language and get right to the point, the task LLB has been set is to help make the whole LHIN initiative work.

"My job and the job of the branch, is to help bring to life the vision of transformation that drove the creation of the LHINs, and has driven so much of what's been going on in health care the past few years. But it is all so new, and we're all learning as we go, so it's important that in every step we take, we take the right one," says Hayward.

The fledgling LLB is composed of 21 people. When fully staffed there will be 46, including Hayward and her managers. The branch is divided into four units responsible for liaison with the LHINs, French Language Health Services, the AIDS Bureau, and two units devoted to the provincial programs and priorities that have remained the responsibility of the ministry.

Hayward and her team are now the primary point of contact between the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and 14 LHINs whose job it now is to plan, organize and fund health care services in their local areas. The branch will provide assistance to LHINs as required in developing agreements with their health service providers. For John Babos, Manager of LHIN Relations and Coordination for LLB, it's a question of consistency.

"We're here to support the LHINs, pure and simple," says Babos. "If we can provide them with a consistent level of help and support, in whatever area they need it, it will enable them to do their jobs. It will also enable the ministry to do its job, which is to provide stewardship of

the system. If all that happens, we will be able to build a system and provide a level of care consistent with this province's vision of health care."

Kathryn McCulloch is the Manager LHIN Liaison: West for LLB. She was also Manager of the LHIN Legislation Project and over the past two years has watched LHINs develop from an idea on paper to a fully realized initiative that has forever changed the way health care is managed in Ontario. She wants to make sure that the successful launch of LHINs is followed by a successful voyage.

"We're talking about nearly \$19 billion that they are now managing. That's a lot of responsibility," says McCulloch. "We have all worked very hard together to make sure that knowledge has been transferred and LHINs are ready to assume that responsibility, and we're going to keep working together to make sure things work as they should."

For Carrie Hayward, critical to the next few years has been the development of an effective Accountability Agreement that clearly lays out the roles and responsibilities of both the ministry and of LHINs, and the obligations each have to the other. The negotiations around that agreement, led by Tracey Mill, Director of the LHIN Project Team, have gone very well.

"Transformation of this scale and Ontario's approach to local health system management has never been done. For the LHINs, they didn't exist two years ago. For the ministry, it's taking on the new role of stewardship, overseeing the transition to LHINs, while also adapting to a huge internal transformation. And we have a huge responsibility, to our health care providers and the 12 million patients who count on them, to get it right."

The LHIN bulletin will continue throughout the early weeks of the transition, in order to address any questions and concerns that providers or members of the public may have. In addition, anyone is welcome to submit questions about LHINs and the ongoing health care transformation in email form to transforminghealth@moh.gov.on.ca. They will be answered directly in as timely a manner as possible.