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JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

Four Counties Health Services welcomes Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre to its Health Village

(Newbury, ON) – The Middlesex Hospital Alliance (MHA) and the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC) are pleased to announce a new partnership at Four Counties Health Services (FCHS), one of two hospital sites of the MHA, to expand access to both primary care and traditional healing services for the area’s Indigenous population.

Over the past 23 years, SOAHAC has grown to be one of the largest Aboriginal Health Access Centre’s (AHAC) in Ontario, serving more than 35,000 First Nation, Metis and Inuit individuals and families across the region. Earlier in 2021, SOAHAC approached FCHS for a satellite space to its Windsor clinic.

SOAHAC and FCHS saw numerous collaborative opportunities, which could provide improved access for clients including, but not limited to: imaging, blood work, diabetes education, adult day program and complementary health care services. These, combined with SOAHAC’s model of care, made for a mutually respectful partnership for all.

MHA is excited at this partnership, as their organization is embarking on improving their Indigenous engagement strategy. Together, they look forward to building long-term relationships with area Indigenous communities premised on the right to health determination and the principles of: shared control, health equity, cultural inclusion, and holistic health. As an Indigenous organization, SOAHAC’s onsite presence will help build stronger awareness of neighbouring First Nations communities, and provide opportunities to strengthen existing partnerships. “We are grateful to have the opportunity to partner with the SOAHAC team to provide a safe and culturally inclusive environment for Indigenous Peoples as part of our commitment to ensure respect, equality and safety in the hospital environment”, says Todd Stepanuk, President and CEO, MHA.

SOAHAC’s wholistic integrated model of care, which combines traditional healing and western healthcare practices, provides culturally sensitive and safe care that encompasses the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional well-being of those they care for. Geographically, SOAHAC has five locations in the Southwest region of Ontario including Windsor, Chippewas of the Thames, London and Owen Sound and its newer location in Waterloo Wellington. The satellite clinic at FCHS will be its sixth.

Indigenous populations have significantly poorer health outcomes than Canadians, with rates of chronic health conditions and comorbidities between 2 to 10 times higher in Indigenous adults than the general population, which SOAHAC’s model aims to address.

“We are excited at the potential for this partnership and the new location to serve the region’s Indigenous population in an even more comprehensive and culturally aware way, which can only lead to better outcomes for our populations, who have endured and are still experiencing the effects of multi-generational trauma and systemic racism within the healthcare system.” says Brian Dokis, Chief Executive Officer of SOAHAC. “Our team was impressed at the breadth of services available at FCHS and their vision of integrated care.”

SOAHAC is the latest in a series of new tenants joining FCHS. “Four Counties Health Services is delighted to welcome SOAHAC as its newest partner, supporting our vision of a vibrant health village at our hospital. A primary care clinic serving First Nation, Metis and Inuit individuals, families and communities across the region adds to the breadth of health-related services available in a rural hospital setting. This means that clients from all of our communities will have increased access to those services all in one location, closer to home,” says Steph Ouellet, Vice President, Strategic Partnerships at the MHA.

The new SOAHAC clinic opened the week of June 7th, 2021, and will be occupying almost 2,300 square feet, which includes six exam rooms, four offices, and a central reception/waiting room area. SOAHAC’s initial team will be comprised of a mental health counsellor, a nurse practitioner, and a family physician, with plans to offer Traditional Healing Services in the near future.

Stephanie Vandevenne, SOAHAC's Privacy Officer & Director of Quality & Accountability says the site has many practical benefits that will help encourage engagement from existing and new clients, including care close to home and in a familiar setting. “Having access to expanded services in a place where the area’s Indigenous populations already attend for emergency services, ambulatory care, tertiary and diagnostic services, will make care more accessible, enabling the delivery of wholistic care to more individuals and families.”

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About MHA:

The Middlesex Hospital Alliance (MHA) is comprised of two fully accredited partner sites: Four Counties Health Services and Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital. A progressive, team-oriented and technologically adept organization of excellence, the MHA is creating a more integrated and seamless approach to treatment by embracing and seeking out partnerships, through collaboration and investing in people. This coordinated approach helps to ensure that a high level of service is provided, while reducing costs and continually enhancing quality.

About SOAHAC:

SOAHAC provides high quality, wholistic health and wellness services by sharing and promoting traditional Indigenous and western health practices. Services are provided to more than 35,000 Indigenous (First Nation, Métis, Inuit) people and their families, living on and off-reserve, in rural areas, and the urban Indigenous communities in London, Windsor and Owen Sound, and soon, in Waterloo-Wellington, as well as surrounding First Nation communities. SOAHAC is proud to be accredited through the Canadian Centre for Accreditation, a third-party designation based on organizational practices that promote ongoing quality improvement and responsive, effective community services.