

# **Toward Seamless Patient Care**

## **A Review of International and Provincial Health Systems with an Ontario Perspective**

**Prepared for the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care**

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### **Executive Summary**

Health care systems are extremely complex and are shaped by such things as history, societal values, culture, economic structure, geography and political climate. An ideal system will have a strong primary health care sector that has services seamlessly linked with all other sectors of the health system. This seamless approach will be uncomplicated and allow people to get the health care they need in a timely manner. Outcomes include better health and increased cost effectiveness.

Although complex, there is value in reviewing health systems and the key components that support seamlessness. Features of health systems throughout Canada and the world may provide ideas for policy changes that could move Ontario closer to seamless delivery of health care. To that end, the first phase of this report is a review of health systems in six countries and all Canadian provinces. The review identifies what is known about healthcare service delivery and funding models to link primary health care services to hospital care and community services. The second phase is a summary of interviews with experts in primary health care in Ontario. The panellists were asked to review the health system reports and provide insight into potential changes in Ontario that would enhance the seamless delivery of care.

The countries that were reviewed were Australia, The Netherlands, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. The health system of each of the provinces was also reviewed, with emphasis on the Ontario experience. A framework for the review of each jurisdiction was developed from literature and databases of the World Health Organization (WHO). Key features of each health system were highlighted.

There are limitations in a report of this nature. The available data about health systems does not always reflect the quality of the health care being provided. At the same time, there is a wealth of information about specific areas within health systems. Data for this report was summarized and edited in order to maintain consistency of the data as much as possible for each jurisdiction. It is difficult to determine the extent to which a jurisdiction has achieved seamlessness in their health system. Despite the drawbacks, the snapshot provided about health care in each of the targeted jurisdictions, along with the professional experiences of the expert panellists, provides a framework for preliminary discussions about potential changes in health policy in Ontario.

The expert panellists were chosen from across the province. They represent a variety of positions and perspectives within Ontario's health care system. Each panellist consented to a taped interview. The main concepts and recommendations from each interview were reviewed with respect to the reports from each targeted jurisdiction in phase one and summarized into a list of themes. The themes are:

- Seamless health care delivery requires that the health care system be reorganized around the experiences of patients rather than the perspectives of health care providers.
- A comprehensive Electronic Health Record (EHR) system in Ontario is essential to providing seamless care across all health sectors.
- Seamless health care delivery requires real time, patient-focused, evaluative data.
- Considerations for restructuring health care governance in Ontario to promote seamless health care delivery could include integrating health and social services.
- Creating a department within the Ontario government that has authority over primary health care activities would provide a single entity that could issue directives (such as pandemic flu directives). It would also create a mechanism for accountability and evaluation in the primary health care sector.
- Multi-year funding commitments are essential for stability in health care programming.
- Addressing the unintended outcomes of physician funding models in primary health care will encourage stronger interprofessional health care teams.
- A strong commitment to the resuscitation of community health and long-term care is vital not only to seamless health care delivery, but also to the sustainability of the health care system as a whole.

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