

### What is an Essential Care Partner (ECP) Program?

An Essential Care Partner (ECP) Program recognizes one or two individuals, chosen by the patient, as integral partners in their care. ECPs provide emotional, psychological, and/or physical support in collaboration with the patient's care team. Participation is optional, and ECPs do not replace professional staff roles.

### Who developed the ECP program? Were NHH staff/patients involved?

Guided by NHH's Experience Framework and shared purpose of *People First*, and in collaboration with the Ontario Health Team of Northumberland (OHT-N) and the Ontario Caregiver Organization (OCO), NHH's ECP Pilot has been co-designed by an inter-disciplinary ECP Working Group comprised of 1A/1B unit representatives (nursing, allied health, social work, Ontario Health and Home) as well as clinical information, privacy, ward clerk, leadership, volunteers and patient and caregiver partners with lived experience. OCO shared tools and supports to help guide the program design, and input was also gathered from other hospitals in Ontario that have successfully introduced similar programs.

### How will the ECP Program be promoted to patients?

The program will be proactively promoted by staff when patients are admitted. Patients and their designated caregivers will be given the option to participate in the program. If they choose to participate, information about training and additional follow-up will be provided.

### Where will the ECP Program be piloted?

The pilot is being implemented on 1A/1B, and will be available to all inpatients on the first floor, including Restorative Care, Inpatient Rehabilitation, Integrated Stroke, and Palliative Care.

### When will the pilot launch?

The program is being piloted at Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) beginning the week of November 3, 2025.

### What is the purpose of the ECP Program?

The program formally acknowledges the role of caregivers in supporting patients at NHH. The ECP has three key pillars: identify the caregiver; include the caregiver as part of the care team; and support the caregiver.

In the event of an outbreak, ECPs will receive training and personal protective equipment (PPE) to enable them to continue to have access to the patient they support in alignment with infection prevention requirements and hospital policies.

## Essential Care Partner Pilot Program FAQs

### **Who can be an ECP?**

ECPs are identified by the patient or substitute decision maker (SDM) or power of attorney (POA) if the patient is incapable.

ECPs may be family members, friends or paid caregivers, including an SDM or POA.

Their role includes providing support during emotional, psychological, and physical aspects of care throughout admission to the 1A/1B units. Education will be provided to ECPs regarding what they can and cannot do.

### **What benefits are expected from the ECP Program?**

The pilot program is expected to enhance patient and caregiver experiences, improve communication between families and the care team, and support the care team in better delivering continuity of care.

Caregiver burden can be reduced through supporting the caregiver with connections to resources to assist them in navigating their caregiver journey.

By formally recognizing caregivers as partners, the program aims to strengthen trust, reduce stress, and contribute to improved patient and caregiver outcomes.

### **Will the program expand hospital-wide and into the community?**

Following evaluation of the pilot's impact and feedback, the program may be scaled hospital-wide and, beyond that, with the support of the OHT-N, expanded to other care provider partners in the community.

### **How can I learn more about the ECP Program and our NHH pilot?**

ECP support binders located at the 1A/1B nursing stations and education will be shared with physician partners and volunteers active on 1A/1B. The ECP pilot will also be reviewed at huddles to answer questions and provide the necessary supports.

### **Who can I contact if I have any additional questions?**

Please reach out to your Patient Care Manager or NHH's Patient Experience Lead at ext. 7744 or [patientrelations@nhh.ca](mailto:patientrelations@nhh.ca).