

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Inaugural *Experience Symposium* brings together hospital and healthcare organizations for a day of learning, collaboration and inspiration

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY, Friday, September 18, 2026—Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) was pleased to host its first ***Experience Symposium*** on Wednesday, September 16, 2026, at the Best Western in Cobourg.

With attendance drawn from a mix of small- and medium-sized hospitals and healthcare organizations, the event brought together professionals and volunteers from communities in and around Northumberland together with provincial and international leaders for a day of knowledge sharing to celebrate achievements, examine common challenges and identify opportunities and tools to enhance the human experience in healthcare.

“For a long time, healthcare organizations were much better at measuring what we did to and for patients, than understanding what care actually felt like, for them, said Susan Walsh, President and CEO of NHH and Co-Chair, of the Ontario Health Team-Northumberland, in her opening remarks.

“The *Excellent Care for all Act* helped open the door in Ontario to make patient experience more visible, and connect patient, caregiver and provider voice closer to the places where decisions are made,” said Walsh, “but the legislation is only a beginning. For a number of years now, we have been on a journey at NHH to elevate human experience, guided by our Shared Purpose, *People First*. We are so pleased with the interest shown in this inaugural event which was designed to help us learn, adapt, and grow together so that we can find ways to expand this work and keep people at the centre of every decision.”

With presentations, panel discussions and networking, the Symposium highlighted a mix of topics, including legislation, specifically, the *Excellent Care for All Act*, in Ontario, which was the focus of the opening address from Susan Walsh, and Canada’s *Apology Act*, explored by guest speakers Claudette Moulton, Health Care Safety and Risk Management Specialist, and Gordon Slemko, General Counsel, from HIROC.

A panel discussion, facilitated by Dr. Emma Smith, local family physician and NHH Quality and Safety Physician Lead, looked at the growing use of experience data to drive meaningful improvements, with expertise shared from the Ontario Hospital Association (Sue Bhella, Manager, Patient Experience), Trillium Health Partners (Adam Gdyczynski, Senior Corporate Lead, Patient Experience) and NHH (Graeme Bakker, Patient Experience Lead).

A second panel discussion, moderated by Graham Bakker, explored the role of volunteers in patient, provider and community experience, with participation from NHH's Board (Laina Andrews, Vice Chair), Foundation (Rhonda Cunningham, CEO), Patient and Family Advisory Council (Gillian Robinson, PFAC Partner) and Auxiliary (Deb Smelko, Vice Chair of the NHH Auxiliary Board, and Co-ordinator of the Hospital Elder Life Volunteer program).

Alison Kilbourn, Acting Executive Lead, Strategic Partnerships and Innovation with the Ontario Caregiver Organization, and Manager of the OCO's Essential Care Partner Support Hub, concluded the event with the latest research into the critical role of caregivers in healthcare.

Speaking to NHH's own journey, Jennifer Gillard, Vice President, Patient Experience, Public Affairs and Strategic Partnerships, described NHH's own work to include patient, caregiver, provider and volunteer voices, including the steady growth of NHH's own Patient and Family Advisory Council—celebrating 10 years of active contributions at the Symposium—and, more recently, the co-design of the NHH Experience Framework to help guide experience priorities and monitor progress.

“What we've learned along the way is that human experience is not a project with a finish line,” said Gillard. “It's an ongoing commitment – an infinity loop. It's built one interaction, one conversation, one relationship, and one act of trust at a time. Our NHH Experience Framework, co-designed through generative discussion with our teams and supported by the global work of The Beryl Institute, gives us a common language and a shared direction. But progress won't be determined by a single metric or initiative. In a health care environment that faces significant pressures and competing demands, human experience is a source of inspiration for system transformation. We've made important progress, but we are still early in this journey. And that journey continues, every day, together.”

NHH extends gratitude to all the speakers and panelists who so generously participated in the Experience Symposium. Special thanks to participating regional partner organizations, including the Ontario Health Team of Northumberland, Community Care Northumberland, the Northumberland Family Health Team, the Community Health Centres of Northumberland, and attendees from hospital and health system partners in Toronto, Oshawa, Quinte, Campbellford, Lindsay, Brockville and Cornwall, without whom the day would not have been possible.

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About Northumberland Hills Hospital – Located approximately 100 kilometres east of Toronto, NHH delivers a broad range of acute, post-acute, outpatient and diagnostic services. Acute services include emergency and intensive care, medical/surgical care, obstetrical care and palliative care. Post-acute specialty services (PASS) include restorative care and rehabilitation. Mental health care, cancer and supportive care, dialysis and other ambulatory care clinics are offered on an outpatient basis through partnerships with regional centres and nearby specialists.

NHH offers a full range of diagnostic services, including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computed tomography (CT) and mammography. The hospital serves the catchment area of west Northumberland County. A mixed urban and rural population of approximately 67,000 residents, west Northumberland comprises the Town of Cobourg, the Municipality of Port Hope, Alderville First Nation and the townships of Hamilton, Cramahe and Alnwick/Haldimand. NHH employs more than 850 people and relies on the additional support provided by physicians, midwives and volunteers. NHH is an active member of Ontario Health (East)—formerly the Central East Local Health Integration Network—and the Ontario Health Team of Northumberland. For more information, please visit nhh.ca or follow us on Facebook [@northumberlandhillshosp](https://www.facebook.com/northumberlandhillshosp) and LinkedIn [Northumberland Hills Hospital](https://www.linkedin.com/company/northumberland-hills-hospital).