



## MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

### **Making History: The Three Fires Confederacy Gathers with Other Nations for Ceremonial Blessing of the *future home of the New Windsor/Essex Acute Care Hospital***

**WINDSOR, ON.** - Today, dignitaries and leadership from regional First Nation communities joined Windsor Regional Hospital and community leaders to honour the land where the New Windsor/Essex Acute Care Hospital will be built and the connection of the original peoples who resided in the area and received healing from the medicines of Mother Earth.

The **Maamaawi Gidoozhichigemin** or "We Build Together" ceremony is part of Windsor Regional Hospital's ongoing efforts to ensure a welcoming and equitable experience for Indigenous patients and visitors at current and future hospital facilities, and to reaffirm a shared commitment to culturally safe and appropriate care.

Caldwell First Nation led a traditional land ceremony at the future home of the new hospital at the northeast corner of County Rd. 42 and the 9th Concession, which is located on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of the Niswi Ishkodewan Anishinaabeg: The Three Fires Confederacy (Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi).

"Today's ceremony is an opportunity to speak to the ancestors and ask the creators to watch over us and make this a great space to heal our minds, body and spirits," explained Caldwell First Nation Chief Mary Duckworth noting the inclusive and historical nature of the event. Chief Todd Cornelius of the Oneida Nation of the Thames was also in attendance.

Elected officials from the City of Windsor, County of Essex, Government of Ontario and Government of Canada were also in attendance.

"We will all benefit from this new hospital and it is important that we are all here to begin the process and build this shared space together."

Councillor and Elder Larry Johnson of the Caldwell First Nation noted the ceremony and luncheon hosted by Windsor Regional Hospital is a landmark moment for all of the indigenous people who participated.

“For the first time in history, The Three Fires Confederacy is able to join with other First Nations and, the Haudenosaunee for something so important as building a hospital. We have been seen as a people who needed non-indigenous medicines. Today, we are seen as full partners with Windsor Regional Hospital to inform the construction and innovations to honour our medicines and cultural beliefs.”

Traditional Knowledge Keeper, Liz Akiwenzie conducted the land ceremony that acknowledged the rich history of First Nations in the area, honoured the diverse traditions and culture of the territory, gave voice to the land and its many stories, and invited positive energy into the project space for healing and wellness of all who will be attending the future hospital.

“It's a way of bridging the awareness, understanding, knowledge and wisdom of the original peoples and settlers working together for the healing and wellness of all,” said Akiwenzie.

The ceremony recognizes the indigenous ancestors who lived and cared for the land, water, plants and animals since time immemorial. Key elements of the ceremony included: sacred pipes, a sacred fire, the remembrance of the ancestors through offerings of strawberries, blueberries and fish, along with, traditional drumming and singing by the Brown Bear Drumming Group from Oneida of the Thames and the Anishinabe Nation Singers from traditional territories in Southwestern Ontario representing the Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi.

**WATCH: Maamaawi Gidoozhichigemin** or "We Build Together" Ceremony [HERE](#)

Following the ceremony, participants gathered at the Ciociaro Club to share a meal, discuss ongoing planning, and recognize Indigenous community contributions to the project.

Earlier this year, WRH submitted a high-level scope proposal and block drawings for the New Windsor/Essex Acute Care Hospital. Plans for the new facility include an Indigenous healing space, prominently located at the front of the building, with access to an outdoor healing garden and storage for traditional medicine supplies. The space is designed to accommodate traditional ceremonies including smudging and meetings with family, caregivers and staff. In addition, the new state-of-the-art facility will include capacity for 100% single-patient rooms and shelled-in space for future growth.

In developing the plans, the project team worked closely with Indigenous partners in Southwestern Ontario, through the Indigenous Services User Group. With representatives from all eight regional First Nations Communities as well as the Can Am Indian Friendship Centre and The Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC), the User Group's work ensures the new acute care hospital will be a welcoming and safe place for Indigenous patients and visitors.

“Our team is honoured to work alongside First Nation Communities and Indigenous partners in the region to improve care and ensure a culturally-safe and welcoming environment,” said David Musyj, President and CEO of Windsor Regional Hospital noting that healthcare has historically not been equitable for Indigenous and First Nations Peoples.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 2015 report documented colonial policies and interventions against the well-being of Indigenous peoples and communities, including Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop and other harmful practices, highlighting a gap in health outcomes for Indigenous people in Canada. Today's event is part of ongoing initiatives to make progress on health related rights of Indigenous people as identified in international law, constitutional law and under the Treaties. Windsor Regional Hospital is working together with Indigenous Governments, communities, and local organizations to build trust, remove existing barriers, and ensure equitable access to healthcare.

“Today was a significant and meaningful moment in this transformational journey we are embarking on together. We remain committed to listening, learning, engaging and working together to provide an inclusive and equitable hospital experience that respects and honours the culture and traditions of First Nations, Inuit, Metis and Urban Indigenous patients at Windsor Regional Hospital now and for future generations.”

The tendering process to select a company to complete the final design and build the New Windsor/Essex Acute Care Hospital is expected to begin in 2025, with construction to follow in 2026.

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Visit [windsorhospitals.ca](http://windsorhospitals.ca) for information about the **New Windsor/Essex Acute Care Hospital** project and subscribe to the project email list for regular updates.

To learn more about the **Three Fires Confederacy** and how it developed, please visit [Three Fires Confederacy — Bayfield Historical Society](#).

**English:** Together We Build

**Anishinabe:** Maamaawi Gidoozhichigemin - “We Build Together”

**Lenape:** Takwileew Wikheu Liwamallsin - “Come together and build and grow in health”

**Oneida:** oskane' lotiyo:te ayoyantla ne' tsi' usahuta'kalitate' - “Working together to make everyone well”