

Media Release

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For Immediate Release

A MILESTONE FOR WINDSOR-ESSEX: CELEBRATING THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF OFFERING COVID-19 VACCINES TO OUR COMMUNITY

WINDSOR, ON. _ It's an anniversary that is cause for pause about how far we've come in protecting our public against COVID-19.

One year ago today, the first individuals in Windsor-Essex were vaccinated for the COVID-19 virus. As initial supply of Pfizer vaccinations were in limited supply doses were made available to employees who worked at Long Term Care/Retirement Homes in our region. Several individuals stepped forward to be among the initial vaccine recipients at the former vaccination centre at the St. Clair College Sportsplex - led by Krystal Meloche, a personal support worker from Seasons Belle River retirement home.

Since that momentous occasion, one year later, more than 725,000 vaccinations have been injected into the arms of over 340,000 individuals from our community.

“This is not an anniversary to forget – it is one to celebrate,” said WRH President and CEO David Musyj. “I applaud the coordinated efforts of our health care practitioners across this region, and our vaccine partners at the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit and the City of Windsor in collaborating towards what is truly a goal discussed daily – doing whatever we can, every day, to inoculate our population, as quickly as we can.”

“Short of Christmas Day 2020 and when we did not have vaccine supply the team worked 7 days a week,” Musyj added.

“Without precedent, our community health agencies banded together to coordinate a mass vaccination effort of an almost unimaginable scale. We value and thank our team and our partners at Windsor Regional Hospital, the



Krystal Meloche, a PSW from Seasons Belle River, was the first individual to receive a COVID-19 vaccination on the official opening of the St. Clair College Sportsplex Vaccination Centre on Dec. 22, 2020.

City of Windsor, the County of Essex, Essex-Windsor EMS, Erie Shores Health Care, the Municipality of Leamington, The Town of Amherstburg and all those who have been a part of this incredible journey,” said Nicole Dupuis, CEO, WECHU. “There is plenty of work still ahead, but today marks the opportunity to look back on what has been accomplished and thank residents of Windsor-Essex for their trust and altruistic sense of community. Faced with the largest public health crisis of our generation, more than 340,000 individuals from 5 years old to 95 years old have stepped up to do their part to protect their loved ones and neighbours in our region.”

The journey towards protecting our public is a story that will be remembered for many years to come. Many will recall initial limits on supplies of Pfizer and other vaccines that led to concerns about shortages and at times, frustration from an anxious public waiting to get vaccinated. As the weeks went by into 2021, supply became easier to arrange, and gradually the opportunity for more and more age groups to qualify for vaccination expanded.

Efforts were region wide. The St. Clair College Sportsplex, previously used as a field hospital during COVID-19’s initial “wave,” was the main centre to receive a vaccination in Windsor until July, 2021. In that nearly seven-month period, 112,777 vaccines were administered at the Sportsplex, involving 85,051 unique individuals.

In March of 2020, the Windsor Essex Vaccination Registration line was created to help handle the growing number of residents looking for vaccine appointments. The call centre, staffed by employees of The City of Windsor, Windsor Regional Hospital and WECHU continues to handle calls daily. Although, the number of lines manned fluctuates based on changes to vaccine age eligibility, there are usually more than 15 phones being answered during the day.

In an effort to continue to ensure that the vaccination effort reached as many residents as possible, work began on February 18th, 2021 to create a mass vaccination clinic at the WFCU Centre. Hundreds of City, hospital and health unit staff worked to convert two of the three community rinks into a vaccination site and incredibly, in less than two weeks, the location was opened to the public. By the time the doors closed on July 31, 2021 72,870 vaccines had been administered.

The University of Windsor also stepped up to help fight COVID-19 by allowing the transformation of its historic Windsor Hall location in downtown Windsor into a vaccination clinic as well. The site, staffed by Windsor Regional, WECHU and City of Windsor staff opened its doors on March 22, 2021. By the time it closed June 18, 2021, more than 31,000 individuals had received COVID-19 inoculations.

More vaccinations throughout the community became available at pharmacies, pop-up clinics, physician’s offices, and these opportunities continue to this day to improve the accessibility of vaccinations.

On June 21st, 2021, WRH along with the City of Windsor and WECHU, through a generous arrangement with property manager Cushman & Wakefield Asset Services Canada, opened the mass COVID-19 vaccination site at Windsor’s Devonshire Mall. Located in the site of the former Sears outlet at the property’s north end, the site continues to inoculate thousands of individuals every week. Currently, the site offers first second and third dose vaccines to anyone 18 years of age and over that is eligible as well as offering first and second doses to the 5-17 year old population. It is anticipated that with some 50,000 individuals still not vaccinated and many tens of

thousands soon to be eligible for their additional doses, the centre will remain open for vaccinations into the spring of 2022.

“We know that the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, with its new variants and changes in transmissibility and impact, have meant the requirements for vaccinations continue to be the most important way to fight COVID-19,” said WRH Chief of Staff Dr. Wassim Saad. “We know that vaccinations does not mean you will never get COVID-19 but it does make the risk of getting very sick and the risk of transmitting the virus to someone you love is greatly reduced. We also know that the vast majority of COVID-19 cases in our Intensive Care Unit involve unvaccinated or only partially vaccinated individuals. We cannot stress enough that if you are eligible for a vaccination, please book one right away at wevax.ca.”

There are many to thank for the successes of our regional vaccination strategy – starting with the general public, those who put the needs of their own health and the health of all of those around them first, and trusted the science to gives us wider community protection against the COVID-19 virus.

We also want to thank our Windsor Police Services, who have been helpful in ensuring the safety and security of vaccination supply and administration throughout the pandemic, as well as our tremendous local hospital partners at Erie Shores HealthCare and Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare for their support and collaboration over these past 12 months in helping our community reach their vaccine needs.

Last but certainly not least, we need to thank our staff. Hundreds of WRH, City of Windsor and WECHU employees have been working tirelessly for a year now in getting our population into vaccination centres and inoculated.

“The efforts of our vaccination teams – representing different organizations and working side by side for months – have truly been extraordinary,” said WRH Chief Operating Officer and Chief Nursing Executive Karen Riddell. “Amid many questions, concerns and truly the stress we have all faced over the course of this pandemic, these dedicated employees continue to rise above many challenges to efficiently and seamlessly collaborate for the needs of our families, friends and neighbours in Windsor-Essex. I encourage our entire region to express their gratitude for the many, many hours of service by these individuals in the face of a frightening pandemic the likes of which has not been seen in many decades. Please continue to support these individuals in the months to come and please seek out your first, second or third dose when eligible.””

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