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THE ONTARIO RURAL COUNCIL

TORC Fall 2006 Update

TORC Rural Health Forum:

Release of new study highlights challenges LHINs face in rural and northern Ontario

(SUDBURY) - TORC was front and centre in this near-north city in September, providing a fitting and timely stage for provincial delegates and LHIN leaders to hear the results of a just-released national study on the health of rural Canadians.

Participants attending the TORC Fall 2006 Public Issue Forum, *LHINS and the Future of Rural Health: What Can our Communities Expect?* (September 25), had the added bonus of hearing first-hand from one of the national study's key researchers, Dr. Roger Pitblado, senior research fellow at the Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research (CRaNHR). TORC partnered with CRaNHR in presenting the Forum for the purposes of discussing implications around the introduction of Ontario's new regionalized health care system – the *Local Health Integration Networks* or *LHINs*. However, the timely release of

than their urban counterparts, exhibit higher rates of smoking, eat less fruits and vegetables and are less physically active. While general mortality rates are higher in rural communities, it

was found that overall cancer incidence rates were found to be lower.

“Unfortunately for rural, there’s
(continued on page 2)



TORC Rural Health Working Group Chair Jim Whaley (middle) welcomes out of province speakers Andrew Will (left) of Aspen Regional Health (Alberta) and Dan Florizone of Five Hills Health Region (Saskatchewan).

“...this report could be interpreted by some as saying we already have a two-tier health care system in Ontario...and it's called 'urban-rural'”
TORC Vice Chair Jim Whaley

“*How Healthy are Canadians? An Assessment of Their Health Status and Health Determinants*” only served to underscore the challenges LHIN directors face in addressing the significant health care needs of rural and northern Ontarians.

Dr. Pitblado, in reviewing highlights of the study, revealed rural residents of Canada are generally less healthy

TORC asked to take lead role in provincial water panel

(GUELPH) - On the heels of TORC's Environmental Forum on Source Water Protection last June, TORC Past Chair Dr. Al Lauzon has been named by the McGuinty government to head an advisory panel to develop a water stewardship program for rural Ontario.

The appointment follows the recent passing of Ontario's Clean Water Act (October 18), empowering municipalities with the responsibility of protecting water sources in their communities. The stewardship program is designed to complement the new Act by extending financial assistance for farmers and small rural businesses to fund initiatives that reduce threats to the drinking water.

“This appointment demonstrates the kind of leadership TORC can bring to rural Ontario,” offers Executive Director Harold Flam-
(continued on page 2)

ROMA Chair addresses TORC AGM

(GUELPH) - Doug Thompson, Chair of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) and City of Ottawa Councillor, was keynote speaker at TORC's Annual General Meeting on September 7th.

Thompson underscored for TORC members the importance of fostering effective (continued)

LHIN leaders address Sudbury's TORC Health Forum

(continued from page 1)

not a whole lot of good news in this report," notes Jim Whaley, Chair of TORC's Rural Health Working Group and Forum Event Coordinator. "But, what it does do is provide a mandatory 'call to action' for the Ontario government and our new LHIN leaders. I would think this report could be interpreted by some as saying we already have a two-tier health care system in Ontario...and it's called 'urban-rural'."

Indeed, three regional LHINs (of which there are 14 in Ontario) were represented in the TORC Forum audience as Dr. Pitblado and France Gélinas, of Centre de Santé Communautaire de Sudbury, outlined less-than-glowing health stats for rural communities. Ongoing issues of access, physician shortages, high risk factors for chronic diseases and the need

to focus on e-health, it was suggested, must be considered front and centre by LHIN directors as they are now making the crucial shift from the community consultation to implementation stages.

David Murray is well aware of the stats. As CEO of the North East LHIN, Murray's catchment area reflects the study's statistics, featuring the second-highest senior population in the province, highest rates of unemployment and highest rates of smoking, obesity and binge drinking. What's more, Murray's northern LHIN covers a staggering 400,000 sq. kms – more than 50 times larger than some of its southern counterparts, making adequate access a major issue in the north.

"The new LHIN system allows communities to assess their own needs and make decisions based on those needs," ex-

plained Murray. "LHINs do not operate the services being provided but rather, fulfill the strategic direction of health care in the region." Murray went on to say that, given the tremendous challenges in today's health care system, there is a need to focus on preventive health measures.

How Healthy Are Rural Canadians? An Assessment of Their Health Status and Health Determinants is a collaborative effort of the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Public Health Agency of Canada and the Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research. Visit www.torc.on.ca/events.shtml#LHINSpeakerPresentations for Executive Summary Report.

As Ontario is the last province to shift to a regionalized health care system, TORC invited speakers from Alberta and Saskatchewan to offer valuable insights and realistic expectations. "There are a lot of 'lessons learned' for Ontario as it continues to implement the LHIN model," notes TORC's Jim Whaley. "Prime among them is the need for LHINs to continually engage their communities about needs and priorities."

ROMA Chair credits TORC with Rural-Urban Summit initiative

(continued from page 1)

partnerships toward the mutual goal of strengthening our communities and organizations.

"ROMA has undergone a major evolution over the last few years," noted Thompson. "We now have the province's ear and the necessary resources...and TORC has that grassroots connection. We need to work together to enhance the work done for rural Ontario."



Doug Thompson

As a city councillor, Thompson cited Ottawa's Rural Summit as a fitting example of collaborative effort toward real solutions. Using TORC's Rural-Urban Summit Model as a basis, the capital city initiated a plan of action toward more effective governance of the outlying rural regions.

"That event has been fundamentally important for rural areas in Ottawa," he noted. "TORC should and can take credit for making that [Summit] happen in the first place. The first three years of amalgamation were very confrontational. We needed

different rules and regulations; you can't just have one by-law for rural and urban interests. Now, post-Summit, we have moved towards that distinction, with significant improvements across the board." (For more info: www.ottawa.ca and click on "Rural Connections".)

Visit www.torc.on.ca to view the newly-elected 2006/2007 TORC Board of Directors!

Bill 43 Clean Water Panel

(continued from page 2)

ing. "TORC initiated with the June Environmental Forum on Source Water Protection, and then was invited as a follow up to provide input to the provincial Standing Committee on Bill 43—The Clean Water Act. To have it culminate in an appointment of this stature is a compliment to all the fine work our volunteer members have put behind this issue."

Joining Dr. Al Lauzon on the water panel will be agricultural, municipal and conservation authority representatives to provide advice on how the drinking water stewardship program should be administered and allocated.

An initial \$7 million will be made available by the Ministry in 2007/2008 for 'early action' to protect drinking water.