



SAVE SOUTH MUSKOKA HOSPITAL COMMITTEE

Medcura Health Report Offside on the Facts: Moving Beyond the “Hockey Rivalry” Narrative in the Bracebridge-Commissioned Review of MAHC

In 2024, the Town of Bracebridge commissioned a third-party review of the current hospital redevelopment proposal by Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC). The review, prepared by Medcura Health, was later used to justify the Town’s decision to provide **\$10 million in Bracebridge taxpayer funding** toward the broader \$225 million local share required for the new hospital builds.

The Save South Muskoka Hospital Committee (SSMHC) reviewed the Medcura report and has identified several key concerns — along with a few important acknowledgments about the current MAHC redevelopment plans.

Top Concerns

1. Reality of Muskoka’s Population and Demographics Not Addressed

The Medcura Report calls the public concern about the hospital redevelopments as akin to a “hockey rivalry” between two towns. This analogy is distracting and harmful. And it avoids a critical fact: the two hospital locations do not serve comparable population bases. Growth projections indicate that **the majority of Muskoka’s population growth through 2050 will occur in South Muskoka**, including South Muskoka as the location for the vast majority of seasonal residents.

Medcura does not meaningfully address Muskoka’s unique demographics — including its high senior population and higher poverty rates relative to provincial averages — and how those realities should influence hospital capacity planning.

Seasonal residents, increasing numbers of seniors, and rural geography create unique healthcare demands that must be adjusted for in a revised hospital redevelopment strategy.

2. Bed Numbers Matter – and are dismissed by Medcura Health

The Medcura Report suggests that focusing on bed counts misses the broader system context. However, acute care bed capacity remains a core determinant of access, wait times, and surge resilience — particularly in a growing and aging community.

South Muskoka's current 67-bed hospital frequently operates at or above capacity. While the redevelopment plan proposes expanded outpatient services, outpatient care does not eliminate the need for inpatient beds when patients require admission. MAHC currently plans for a reduction to 46-beds at the future South Muskoka hospital site.

Any assumption that outpatient growth will offset acute demand must be clearly supported by demographic projections, utilization data, and evidence of sufficient community-based supports — particularly in South Muskoka that does not have the same outpatient infrastructure as larger urban centres. Medcura's position is not sufficiently evidenced.

3. Limited Review of Specialist Recruitment

The proposed model will have a smaller hospital in Bracebridge with a generally reduced scope of services than today with more focus on diagnostics and surgery. SSMHC is concerned this will make it more difficult to attract and retain medical specialists to South Muskoka outside of the focus. The Medcura report provides little evidence that the model will be competitive in today's challenging healthcare recruitment environment.

4. Travel Impacts Are Minimized

Under the proposed MAHC plan, residents will need to travel to Huntsville or Orillia for intensive care or longer hospital stays. While travel for healthcare is common in Ontario, the Medcura Report does not fully examine the financial, health, and family impacts associated with requiring travel in relation to longer term hospital stays.

5. Fails to Assess Against Provincially Recognized Healthcare Standards

The Ontario Ministry of Health requires that hospital redevelopment plans demonstrate accessible, high-quality, equitable, and population-responsive care.

The Medcura Report emphasizes outpatient care and shorter hospital stays as pathways to better outcomes, but it fails to address Muskoka's limited community supports. Continuity of care — including hospital stays integrated with family physicians and local support networks — is particularly important in rural and aging communities. The report does not analyze whether MAHC's proposed model meets these provincial principles when applied to Muskoka's specific demographic and geographic realities.

Important Points the Medcura Report Confirms

Despite its criticisms, SSMHC notes several findings in the Medcura report that reinforce community concerns:

- **Community engagement is essential.** The report acknowledges significant public criticism and the need for meaningful local input.
- **The \$225 million local share is critical.** Municipal funding plays a major role in securing provincial approval — giving local governments significant responsibility and influence.
- **The larger Huntsville hospital will continually challenge a smaller Bracebridge site.** The report confirms the Bracebridge site will be smaller and cautions against making it too small.
- **Residents will travel for certain levels of care.** The report clearly acknowledges that South Muskoka residents will absolutely need to travel for some typical admissions and many specialized services.
- **Financial limits are shaping decisions.** The report presents reduced services as a funding reality — but SSMHC asserts that planning choices and politics, not just finances, will determine long-term healthcare access.

Bottom Line

The Medcura Report was prepared to support Town of Bracebridge municipal funding for MAHC's redevelopment plan. However, SSMHC asserts that the report was not sufficient for this purpose; it does not assess key measures for a successful hospital redevelopment plan and instead minimizes and trivializes legitimate concerns.

The hospital planning decisions made today will shape healthcare access in South Muskoka for decades. SSMHC continues to advocate for a model that reflects South Muskoka's growth, aging population, and rural geography — and ensures equitable and sustainable care for the community.

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More information about the Save South Muskoka Hospital Committee and related resources can be found on our website: www.ssmh.ca