

ATTENTION NEWS EDITORS: For immediate release
Ombudsman to investigate Hamilton/Niagara-area LHIN

TORONTO (March 24, 2009) – Ontario Ombudsman André Marin announced today he is launching an investigation into the decision-making process of the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network (HNHB LHIN), including its approach to its mandate of “community engagement” when it deals with proposals for the restructuring of health services.

The investigation will be conducted by the Special Ombudsman Response Team (SORT). In recent months, the Ombudsman has received a total of 37 complaints about the HNHB LHIN, from residents, community associations, health care professionals and a local MPP. Of those, 24 complaints concern the LHIN’s consideration of Hamilton Health Sciences’ “Access to Best Care” proposal and 13 were about the Niagara Health System’s Hospital Improvement Plan.

“There is a lot of public concern about the accountability and transparency of the LHIN,” Mr. Marin said. “Are those concerns justified? That’s what we’re going to find out.”

While the Ombudsman does not have jurisdiction over hospitals, he does have jurisdiction over the province’s 14 LHINs, which are responsible for disbursing about \$20 billion in funding – or about two-thirds of the province’s health care budget – to local health care systems. The Ombudsman will *not* assess the merits of the Hamilton and Niagara restructuring proposals themselves. Rather, his investigation will focus on the LHIN’s role in the decisions made and alleged problems with the process, including complaints of insufficient consultation.

The HNHB LHIN is the second-largest in the province, covering 1.4 million residents. This is the first Ombudsman investigation into one of the LHINs, which were created in 2006. The Ombudsman expects the evidence-gathering phase of the investigation to take about six weeks.

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