



Quest

Community Health Centre

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2029
HEALTH CARE THAT CHANGES LIVES





MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We are proud to present Quest Community Health Centre's new Strategic Plan for 2026-2029: *"Health Care That Changes Lives."* This plan serves as our roadmap for the coming three years, reflecting our deep commitment to engaging clients, staff, volunteers, community partners, and funders in shaping a healthier, more equitable future for all.

Our Strategic Plan focuses on three key priorities:

- **Delivering high-quality, accessible primary health care** that meets the evolving needs and characteristics of our clients and community.
- **Collaborating to strengthen Niagara's health system**, enabling more effectively support for individuals with complex health needs throughout the region.
- **Building a high-performing organization** that reflects the diversity of our community and remains a welcoming, inclusive workplace for all.

We are excited to embark on this next chapter and extend our heartfelt thanks to the strategic planning committee, staff, clients, Board members and community partners who generously contributed their time, perspectives, and expertise. Your input was instrumental in shaping this vision.

Throughout this process, we heard clearly that Quest CHC is widely recognized as a trusted, expert provider of primary and community health care – deeply connected with and valued by its priority populations. We take pride in our meaningful contributions to addressing the needs of a well-defined client base. At the same time, we acknowledge the work ahead to fully realize our strategic objectives.

This plan builds on the strong foundation of our past achievements while thoughtfully addressing areas that require renewed focus. As a vital partner within Niagara's primary health care system, we remain committed to working collaboratively with others to improve the health and well-being of individuals who face complex and persistent barriers to care.

Together, we will continue advancing toward our shared vision: *Health Care That Changes Lives.*

Sincerely,

Mary Jane

Mary Jane Johson
Board Chair

Nancy

Nancy Garner
Executive Director

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This strategic plan charts a path forward for Quest Community Health Centre (Quest CHC) over the next three years – 2026 to 2029. Grounded in its commitment to equity, community, and high-quality health care, the plan reaffirms Quest’s role as a responsive, accessible, and innovative primary and community health care provider serving individuals with complex health needs in the Niagara region.

The plan has been developed on the basis of extensive and rigorous evidence, as well as the inputs and contributions of clients, partner organizations, service providers, and other parties with an interest in the health and well-being of Niagara residents. Most importantly, the plan has been shaped by Quest’s own contribution, through the inputs of its staff, leadership, and Board members.

The plan identifies the following key guiding statements.

VISION

Health care that changes lives.

At the core of Quest’s approach to health care is a commitment to being a true partner in each person’s health journey towards meaningful and lasting changes in their health and well-being. This journey is shaped by individual needs, circumstances, experiences and choices. Working alongside clients, Quest acknowledges this uniqueness and is committed to building trust, respect, and understanding, supporting people through primary and community health care, social connections, and contributing to addressing the broader social determinants of health.

MISSION

Quest delivers low-barrier integrated primary health care supporting individuals with complex health needs.

The mission articulates the purpose and fundamental objectives of Quest, defining its priority populations, geographic focus, and key contribution. Quest’s priority population is constituted by individuals whose health needs demand ongoing, coordinated support and who often face systemic barriers that limit their access to mainstream health care services. Meeting the needs of this group requires a specialized approach - Quest’s health care model - which is integrated, multidisciplinary, and anchored in Quest’s commitment to quality, accessibility, and health equity.

ASPIRATION

Quest is recognized as a primary health care leader driving collective impact and solutions for its target population in the Niagara region.

The aspiration defines the result that Quest is pursuing with its strategic plan in the short term, from 2026 to 2029. It builds on the strong expertise it has already established in primary health care and articulates Quest’s goal to take on a central role in shaping a collective approach to improve the health of its priority population. This involves expanding its influence in health system planning and coordination, strengthening

partnerships with key interested and affected parties in health care and beyond, and renewing its commitment to community development, a core responsibility of a Community Health Centre.

VALUES

- Health Equity
- Accessibility
- People Focus
- Collaboration
- Responsiveness

The core values serve as a guide for governance and informed decision-making. They play an essential role in guiding the plan's implementation, ensuring its consistency with Quest's vision and objectives, while providing a base on which the organization can respond to new and emerging issues and realities.

Quest has identified three strategies that it will implement to advance towards its vision, fulfill its mission, and achieve its aspiration.

1 HIGH-QUALITY PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Provide high-quality, accessible primary health care that is responsive to the evolving needs and characteristics of its clients and community.

- Engage with the community to build a clear and nuanced understanding of the health needs, trends, and characteristics of the clients and community served by Quest.
- Continuously improve service quality and accessibility to support better health outcomes and client experience, incorporating current best practices and innovations.
- Reach out to clients, directly or through partnerships, to bring Quest's services to those who need them, where they need them.
- Build a strong evidence base to demonstrate Quest's impact on individuals, equity deserving populations, and the broader health system.

Quest's first strategy reflects the essence of its work: providing primary health care services that improve health outcomes for its priority population. Ensuring the quality of the services that individuals with complex health needs receive is essential to achieve results and requires specialized and evolving technical expertise. Further, a large part of Quest's priority population faces structural, social, and economic barriers to health care. Therefore, ensuring accessibility and responsiveness is another key element of Quest's work, which requires an active and ongoing commitment to building connections with the populations served and strengthening Quest's knowledge of their changing conditions, experiences, and needs.

2 STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

Work collaboratively to strengthen Niagara's health system so it can better support individuals with complex health needs in the Niagara region.

- Identify and build priority partnerships based on their potential impact, considering the strengths, limitations, and mandate of all partners involved, including Quest.
- Strengthen Quest's leadership within the Niagara Ontario Health Team in supporting equity deserving populations and individuals with complex needs by facilitating dialogue, coordination, the development of new initiatives, and knowledge exchange.

- Implement targeted community capacity development initiatives to promote a collective approach to supporting individuals with complex health needs.
- Anchor Quest's communications and positioning in its impact on its priority population, the broader community, and overall health system objectives.

Quest recognizes that for its priority population to achieve meaningful and lasting changes in their health and well-being, the broader health system needs to formulate a collective response. Consequently, this strategy frames Quest's commitment to assuming a leadership role in the creation of the systemic conditions needed to improve health outcomes for individuals with complex health needs in the Niagara region, in line with its commitment to health equity and founded on its understanding of the social determinants of health. Pursuing this strategy includes working within the health system as well as across sectors to improve coordination, reduce gaps in care, and align resources to better serve equity-deserving populations.

3

ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

Continue building a high-performing organization that reflects its community and remains a great place to work.

- Strengthen Quest's relationship and alignment with funders, especially at the provincial and local level, to ensure its resources keep pace with service growth and Quest's staffing, facilities, and operational needs.
- Nurture an inclusive organizational culture based on communication, continuous learning, innovation, and commitment to Quest's goals and each other.
- Enhance the organization's processes, operations, and managerial and physical structures to improve service integration, results, and the usage of resources.

This strategy reaffirms Quest's dedication to maintain and strengthen its organizational capacity in the context of rising demand and ongoing change in the health system. Against this backdrop, Quest recognizes that it must continue to grow, preserving its core strengths while improving its internal systems and structures, while balancing its resource constraints. Further, in line with Quest's values, the organization is committed to improving how well its workforce reflects the community it serves. This requires careful attention to resources, people, processes, and infrastructure, with a focus on creating a supportive and high-performing work environment.



INTRODUCTION

Quest is a Community Health Centre (CHC) serving St. Catharines and the broader Niagara region. Established in 2007, it now supports over 8,250 clients through the work of approximately 50 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. Over the past 18 years, Quest has expanded and adapted its services, establishing itself as a high-quality provider of primary and community health care. It focuses on individuals with complex health needs who face systemic and personal barriers to care. These clients often require interdisciplinary, tailored, and flexible support.

Quest is well known for its work with LGBTQI+ individuals and temporary foreign agricultural workers. However, its services go well beyond these groups and include, among others, individuals experiencing homelessness, at-risk youth and families, isolated seniors, and people living with mental health and addiction challenges. Through its work, Quest offers comprehensive, team-based, and multidisciplinary primary health care and contributes to improving how the broader health system responds to the needs of its priority population.

In recent years, the context in which Quest operates has shifted considerably. The organization has grown, the needs of its community have evolved, and the health system has undergone structural and operational changes. Further, long-standing and emerging labour market pressures and a constrained funding environment add to the complexity of Quest's work.

In response to these internal and external changes, Quest launched a strategic planning process in 2024 to define its priorities and direction for 2026-2029. This process was founded on extensive research, involved staff, senior management, and the Board of Directors, and incorporated insights from partners, clients, community members, and other interested and affected parties.

This document presents the results of Quest's strategic planning process. It explains the rationale behind each component of the strategic plan and is intended as a reference to guide Quest in its decisions, helping the organization stay aligned with its goals and values, even when faced with emerging and unexpected opportunities and challenges.

METHODOLOGY

Quest engaged the KSAR Consulting Group (KSAR) to support the development of its strategic plan. KSAR's methodology follows five key steps: initiation and planning, environmental scan, strategic diagnosis, the development of the strategic plan itself, and the creation of an operational plan and performance dashboard.



The foundation of the strategic plan is the environmental scan, which provides a comprehensive understanding of the context in which Quest operates. This analysis draws on three complementary approaches:

- A document and literature review of both internal and external sources.
- A data analysis based on Statistics Canada datasets.
- Consultations involving a wide range of interested parties, including Quest's clients, partners, staff, senior management, Board of Directors, and other actors in the health and social services sectors in the St. Catharines and Niagara region.

Consultations were conducted employing various methods, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and workshops.

The findings from the environmental scan informed the strategic diagnosis, which analyzes Quest's current strengths and the challenges it faces or is likely to face in the near future. This diagnosis considers both internal and external factors and considers short- and long-term perspectives. Methodologically, the strategic diagnosis is based on two main analytical tools: a Political, Economic, Social, Technological, and Legal (PESTL) analysis and a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) matrix.

Based on this analysis, the strategic plan defines Quest's guiding statements - its mission, vision, and values - developed with inputs from senior management and the Board of Directors. These statements are supported by three strategies that will guide the organization's work over the next three years, each further detailed through a set of sub-strategies.

Finally, the operational plan and dashboard offer tools to support implementation and to monitor progress and conditions that may affect success.

This document covers steps 1 to 4 of the strategic planning process. The results of step 5, the measurement framework and implementation plan, are provided separately.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The purpose of the environmental scan is to provide a comprehensive and forward-looking analysis of the characteristics, trends, challenges, and opportunities within Quest and its operating context. This analysis is intended to inform strategic decisions that are ambitious yet realistic, and to help the organization anticipate and manage potential risks and tensions related to the plan's implementation.

The findings of the scan are organized into three main themes: Quest itself, the community of St. Catharines and Niagara, and the broader health and social sector policy environment.

QUEST CHC

Quest is a Community Health Centre (CHC) serving people with complex health needs in the St. Catharines–Niagara region through a multidisciplinary model of care that integrates primary health care, health promotion, and community development. It is part of the Alliance for Healthier Communities, which unites and supports 74 CHCs in Ontario under a shared mandate of advancing health equity.

Quest's work focuses on addressing the needs of individuals who often face barriers to accessing care. Its priority populations include the 2SLGBTQI+ community, temporary foreign agricultural workers, individuals experiencing homelessness, at-risk youth and families, isolated seniors, and people living with mental health and addiction challenges. Services are delivered by a team of 49.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff¹ who are highly engaged and committed to Quest's mission and to the CHC model of care. These services span primary care, urgent services, dental care, youth mental health outreach, and specialized support programs such as Niagara Homelessness Emergency Liaison and Peer Support (HELPS) and Urgent Service Access Team (USAT).

In 2023-2024, Quest served 8,250 clients, a 12.7% increase over the previous year, resulting in 47,628 service interactions. The majority of interactions involved physicians and nurses, followed by outreach and counselling workers. This growth reflects both rising demand and Quest's expanding service offering. Further, clients and partners indicate that, despite growing pressure on resources, Quest has remained responsive to the needs of equity-deserving groups and continues to fill a clearly defined niche within the local health system.

Client feedback remains highly positive: in a 2023 survey, 89% report being satisfied with their care, and over 90% feel welcomed and respected. However, satisfaction declined slightly compared to the previous year, especially in group-based services. Further, it must be noted that clients have to face longer wait times to receive Quest's services. This mirrors broader challenges in the health care system, including overstretched emergency services, a shortage of primary care providers, and persistent workforce pressures.

¹ Based on 2023-2024 data.



CHCs like Quest also face substantial compensation gaps compared to hospitals and other institutions, complicating recruitment and retention efforts.

Quest's continued growth presents several operational and strategic challenges. Internally, both staff and management are navigating increasing workloads, often involving multiple roles and expanding responsibilities. While the organization benefits from a cohesive and dedicated team, its current structure appears to be nearing capacity, and there is an appetite among staff for stronger communication around priorities and goals, which the development of the strategic plan will help address.

Externally, Quest operates in a complex and evolving health system where collaboration is essential. It maintains strong relationships with local health care providers, governments, and educational institutions, and is recognized by many partners as a sector leader, particularly in its work with 2SLGBTQI+ individuals and temporary foreign agricultural workers. These partnerships are key to sustaining programming and workforce development, and many interested and affected parties see Quest's contributions as aligned with their own priorities, including reducing pressure on acute care services. However, several partners noted that there could be both efficiency and effectiveness advantages in improving clarity around roles, responsibilities, and the added value of each organization, as well as more timely communication. Addressing these issues presents an opportunity to strengthen partnerships and improve results.

ST. CATHARINES AND NIAGARA

Quest operates in a region undergoing significant demographic and socio-economic change and the demand for its services is expected to continue rising, driven by population growth, shifting demographics, as well as long-standing and emerging economic and social challenges.

In 2021, the population of the St. Catharines-Niagara Census Metropolitan Area (SCN CMA) reached 433,604, reflecting a growth rate of 7% since 2016, which is slightly above the provincial average. During the same period, on the other hand, the City of St. Catharines has experienced more modest growth (3%). Still, looking ahead, the Niagara region is projected to grow significantly, with its population being expected to expand by roughly 60% by 2051. Demographic shifts are also reshaping the community. In 2021, seniors accounted for 24% and 23% of the populations of the St-Catharines-Niagara CMA and of St. Catharines alone, which represent a growth of, respectively, 16% and 10%. At the same time, the newcomer population is also growing, and in 2021 represented 18% and 19% of the CMA and of St. Catharines, showing a 12% and 7% increase between 2016 and 2021. This changing demographic profile is reshaping health and social service needs in the region.

Socio-economic challenges in the region are significant and growing. Although incomes are rising in line with provincial trends, they remain comparatively low: in 2021 the average individual income in the CMA was \$94,700 and the median was \$77,000, which were 18% and 15% lower, respectively, than the rest of Ontario. The unemployment rate in the area at the time of the last census was alarmingly high at 16%, 4 percentage points higher than Ontario as a whole, while the labour force participation rate stood at 58%,

well below the provincial average of 63%. Food insecurity has worsened amid rising inflation, affecting 21% of Niagara households, which is reflected in rising demand for food bank services. The community also faces a significant housing affordability crisis, like much of the rest of the province and country. In 2021, the region faced a shortfall of 7,048 affordable housing units, and 12% of households were classified as being in Core Housing Need (CHN). These rates are especially high among single mothers (21%), Black-led households (19%), newcomer-led households (18%), and households headed by individuals under 25 (18%). Finally, the current economic uncertainty and the risk of a national and perhaps global recession further weaken the economic outlook of the region. In this context, participants in the consultations also noted that issues such as mental health and addictions are increasingly prevalent and interconnected with homelessness, unemployment, and food insecurity.

These challenges are driving a steady rise in the number and complexity of health and social issues reported in the community, exacerbating negative individual health outcomes and placing increased pressure on providers of health and social services. In this regard, consultations' participants consistently emphasized that the demand for Quest's services is growing, is expected to continue rising, and that these services are increasingly essential to individuals with complex health needs.

Finally, while Quest's visibility among the broader public is somewhat limited, the work of the organization is well known and valued by the people it serves. Its location, close its priority population, has been identified as a key asset that helps promote trust and sustained engagement with clients.

HEALTH SYSTEM CONSIDERATIONS

While both the federal and provincial governments have recently increased their funding for primary health care, mental health, digital health infrastructure, and the health workforce, Canada's health systems face increasing pressure and remain under tight resource constraints.

Further, the Government of Ontario is implementing a provincial health care strategy focused on advancing the integration of the provincial health system, with the goal of promoting efficiency, effectiveness, and partnerships. These objectives are operationalized through the expansion of Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) and supported by the promotion of digital health tools and data sharing. Further, the provincial government is expanding the role and responsibilities of various health service providers, such as pharmacists and health service centres. Finally, it is important to note that at the beginning of 2025, the government of Ontario launched a Primary Care Action Plan that continues to sustain and emphasize reducing wait times, expanding access, and integrating services, especially through the OHT model.

At the federal level, the Government of Canada has committed \$200 billion over 10 years to strengthen health care across provinces and territories, with targeted investments in areas such as youth mental health, dental care, and digital infrastructure.



Key federal and provincial priorities with implications for Quest include:

- Improving access to primary care, particularly in underserved areas.
- Expanding youth mental health services.
- Investing in dental care for uninsured low- and moderate-income individuals.
- Strengthening digital health and health data systems.
- Reducing emergency department usage and hospital admissions.
- Increasing health care workforce capacity, including support for internationally educated professionals.

Across the health and social sectors, Quest is recognized by partners and sector actors as playing a distinct and valuable role in delivering primary health care to people with complex health needs, which aligns Quest's work with broader policy goals, particularly those related to health system integration, care for underserved groups, and reducing reliance on emergency services.

Quest's membership and participation in several Niagara OHT working groups are appreciated and seen as important contributions. Its collaborative approach is noted, and the organization is perceived as a reliable and constructive partner within the health system. Still, some interviewees noted that Quest could take on a greater leadership role by proactively bringing forward issues and solutions in its areas of expertise. Doing so could strengthen its influence and reinforce its added value within the local health system.

Finally, the relationship between CHCs in the Niagara region is seen as collaborative and constructive. Several respondents suggested that this positive dynamic creates space for CHCs to collectively define their future role and value in the region, particularly as the province continues to promote integration in the health system and expands the role of OHTs.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN – KEY INSIGHTS

Quest CHC

- Quest is recognized as a trusted and expert primary and community health care provider that is well connected with and valued by its priority populations.
- The organization maintains a clear focus on equity and access, which remains highly relevant in the current health and social context.
- Internal capacity constraints, including staffing and infrastructure, emerge as constraints to meet increasing service demand.

St. Catharines and Niagara

- The Niagara region is experiencing demographic shifts, including population growth, aging residents, and increased immigration. At the same time, the region is facing both persistent and emerging economic and social issues. These challenges are being compounded by challenges in food insecurity, homelessness, mental health, and addictions, which are tightly linked to increasing and complex health needs.
- Service providers across the region are navigating these complex social issues with limited resources, highlighting the need for coordination and partnership.

Health System

- Ontario's health system is undergoing structural changes, including the rollout and expansion of Ontario Health Teams (OHTs), with an emphasis on integration and efficiency.
- Workforce shortages and financial pressures are straining many parts of the system.
- Quest's value added and role in the health system aligns with provincial and local health priorities, which creates opportunities for the organization to expand its leadership role.

STRATEGIC DIAGNOSIS

The strategic diagnosis builds on the foundational knowledge developed during the environmental scan. Quest's senior management team and Board of Directors were actively involved and consulted in the development of the strategic diagnosis, helping to validate and refine key insights. Two complementary analytical frameworks were applied to guide this work:

1. **Political, Economic, Social, and Technological (PESTL) factors analysis**, which is a tool that helps identify external forces that may influence Quest's environment and operating context.
2. **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) matrix analysis**. This internal-external diagnostic helps examine what Quest does well, where it faces challenges, and what external factors may support or hinder its future success.

PESTL ANALYSIS

POLITICAL FACTORS

- Federal and provincial governments influence health care priorities, funding, and program design, impacting Quest's operations and responsibilities.
- Shared federal-provincial goals include keeping people out of hospitals, lowering wait times, and improving primary health care attachment.
- These priorities align with Quest's role in serving equity-deserving populations who often use hospitals for non-acute care needs.
- The provincial government's focus on health system integration may lead to:
 - An expanded role for non-traditional health actors, including private sector organizations.
 - Increased responsibilities for Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) in coordination and possibly funding decisions.
- Health care funding is projected to grow, with emphasis on mental health, service delivery, and health data initiatives. However, funding may not keep pace with increasing demand and rising costs.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

- Demand for Quest's services is expected to grow due to rising economic vulnerability, which is strongly correlated with health and social outcomes.
 - Supply constraints are anticipated to increase housing costs in the Niagara region.
 - Macroeconomic uncertainty could continue to increase inflation and, thus, the cost of living.
 - Rising costs and tighter business margins may reduce labour demand, potentially increasing unemployment and/or suppressing wages.
- Delivering Quest's services may become more expensive due to inflation and resulting rising supply costs.
- Ontario's fiscal deficit has recently shrunk, but funding sustainability remains a concern amid economic uncertainty, rising health care costs, and service expansions.

SOCIAL FACTORS

- The population in the Niagara region is aging, which is driving increased demand for specialized health care services for seniors.
- The rising number of newcomers highlights the need for adaptable health care delivery.
- Local and broader socio-economic trends are resulting in an increase in homelessness, mental health issues, and addiction, which is increasing demand for low-barrier comprehensive health care.
- Public opinion around the 2SLGBTQI+ population is shifting.

TECHNOLOGICAL FACTORS

- Provincial strategies emphasize the growth of digital health tools, such as telehealth services and enhanced data-sharing capabilities, to improve patient access to timely information and care.
- Ontario Health is prioritizing the use of data to optimize decision-making, enhance service delivery, and achieve better health care outcomes.
- The health system is beginning to explore and test how AI tools could be employed to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

LEGAL FACTORS

- Evolving regulations around safer supply and safe-injection sites may influence and concentrate service demands from equity-deserving populations.
- Changes in immigration rules could impact population trends, though policies for seasonal agricultural workers currently remain unchanged.
- The ongoing implementation of Bill 60 is expanding the roles and responsibilities of health actors, including pharmacists and private sector providers.
- Bill 60 also facilitates the integration of health professionals trained outside Ontario into the provincial health care system, potentially easing workforce shortages.

SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Quest delivers primary health care with excellent quality to equity-deserving populations in the St. Catharines and Niagara region.
- Quest brings about a valued contribution in addressing the needs of a well-defined client base.
- Quest is a recognized primary health care leader for specific subgroups: 2SLGBTQI+ community and seasonal agricultural workers.
- Good visibility among the target population and high client satisfaction.
- Cohesive, committed staff.
- Reputation among a wide range of partners and sectoral actors as to being a sectoral expert and a helpful and open organization.
- Good presence across NOHT's working groups.

WEAKNESSES

- The organizational structure is considered to be at its capacity, due to human and financial resource constraints as well as an expanding demand.
- Wait times are a challenge.
- Operational costs are growing due to the expansion of services and the rising complexity of client needs with close to no budget increase.
- Greater clarity in the establishment and communication of goals and priorities is desired.
- Limited availability of time and resources to manage complex partnerships.
- Quest's visibility among its non-target population and the broader health system is limited.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Provincial and federal investments in sectors of interest, such as health system strengthening and integration, mental health and addictions, are increasing.
- NOHT and key health care system partners, including other CHCs in the Niagara region, are seeking to strengthen collaboration with actors whose value added aligns well with their priorities.
- Community needs and demand are growing, and Quest's work continues to align well with them.
- Possibility of moving to a new building.

THREATS

- Growing service delivery expectations from funders, clients and the broader health system may put pressure on the organization and its priorities.
- Recruitment challenges in a tight and competitive labour market.
- CHCs suffer from a pay gap compared to the rest of the health system.
- Increasing complexity of target population needs.
- Anticipated health system changes require effective and efficient adaptation.
- Competitive funding environment.

STRATEGIC DIAGNOSIS – KEY INSIGHTS

The strategic diagnosis highlights several forces that will shape Quest's future trajectory. While the environment presents clear opportunities for growth, it also brings complex challenges that will require deliberate and careful planning.

First, the analysis reveals clear indications that Quest will continue to grow. Demand for Quest's services is expected to continue increasing due to a convergence of social, economic, and demographic factors that will ultimately result in rising and more complex health needs among Quest's priority populations.

Quest is well positioned to provide a meaningful contribution to meet this demand. However, doing so will require scaling its operations while balancing resource constraints and staff workloads and maintaining its commitment to high-quality health care.

At the same time, the diagnosis identifies risks that could constrain Quest's capacity to respond. Across Ontario, the health system is experiencing structural constraints, including workforce shortages and budget limitations. These pressures are unlikely to ease in the short term. Internally, Quest's organizational structure and systems appear to be approaching their current capacity. Without adaptation, this could limit responsiveness and affect staff well-being.

Further, these elements need to be read within the continued evolution of health system governance. Shifts in roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms across the system may require Quest to adjust how it engages with other health actors, defines its scope, and allocates leadership capacity.

Finally, the analysis points to a few levers that Quest can use to attain its strategic objectives and manage its growth.

The first lever reflects the fact that Quest's mandate and health care model can effectively support government health priorities, thanks to its focus on preventative, team-based, primary and community health care.

The second lever is based on the observation that several health, community, and social service organizations have expressed a willingness to collaborate more closely with Quest. These relationships can support more coordinated care, reduce duplication, and provide access to shared resources and opportunities.

The final lever is Quest's reputation as a sector expert, which provides it with the credibility needed to position itself as a leader, advocate effectively for resources, and pilot new programs in partnership with others.

QUEST CHC – STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-29

The strategic diagnosis and environmental scan framed and informed the contributions of Quest’s leadership and Board of Directors in the developing the organization’s strategic plan.

VISION

The vision offers a clear, concise, and motivating statement that defines Quest’s long-term contribution and its approach to creating lasting impact.

Health care that changes lives

At the core of Quest’s approach to health care is a commitment to being a true partner in each person’s health journey towards meaningful and lasting changes in their health and well-being. Quest works alongside its clients to build relationships based on trust, respect, and understanding, and ensuring they are heard and supported rather than simply directed toward treatment.

Quest understands that achieving meaningful and lasting change in health is a personal journey, shaped by individual needs, experiences, perspectives, choices, and circumstances. This journey includes supporting people through primary and community health care, social connections, mental health, and contributing to addressing the broader social determinants of health.

MISSION

The mission articulates the purpose and fundamental objectives of Quest, defining its key clients, geographic focus, and unique contribution.

Quest delivers low-barrier integrated primary health care supporting individuals with complex health needs

Quest’s mission defines its priority population and the approach it takes to serve them. This population includes individuals whose health needs demand ongoing, coordinated support and who often face systemic barriers that limit their access to mainstream health care services. Meeting these needs requires a specialized approach, which forms the foundation of Quest’s health care model.

First, the model is integrated, connecting various health-related services in the domain of prevention, health promotion, and treatment as part of a comprehensive approach to health and well-being. This approach is team-based and multidisciplinary, bringing together physicians, nurses, social workers, dieticians, therapists, and other professionals. Second, the model strives to minimize barriers to care, adapting to patients’ needs, schedules, and preferences, while promoting a welcoming, non-judgmental environment. Finally, the model is uncompromising in its commitment to quality, which is essential to achieve equitable health outcomes.



ASPIRATION

The aspiration defines the main result that Quest will pursue with its strategic plan in the short term, from 2026 to 2029.

Quest is recognized as a primary health care leader driving collective impact and solutions for its target population in the Niagara region

Quest's aspiration builds on the strong expertise it has already established in primary health care and articulates its goal to take on a central role in shaping a collective to improve the health of its priority population.

First, this involves expanding its influence in health system planning and coordination, anchoring its role and added value in its expertise and impact in supporting individuals with complex health needs. Second, it means strengthening partnerships with key interested parties in health care and beyond, sharing best practices, and continuously enhancing solutions. Finally, it reflects Quest's ongoing commitment to community development, a core responsibility of a Community Health Centre, focused on improving health promotion and driving sustainable change for its target population.

VALUES

Values are the principles that shape Quest's organizational behaviour. They serve as a lens through which to assess emerging issues, make decisions, and measure the impact of the organization's work. Values, therefore, play an important role in the development of policies, initiatives, and partnerships, and in steering the organization when faced with unexpected challenges or opportunities.

Health Equity

Advancing health equity means working towards ensuring that everyone can reach their full potential for health and well-being and is a principle at the heart of Quest's work, shaping both its services and its role within the broader health care system.

Every aspect of Quest's works, from service delivery, through community development, to its role in the broader health system, is influenced by its dedication to advance health equity, which motivates its commitment to reduce barriers, address disparities, and create conditions that support improvements in the health of individuals facing complex health needs.

Accessibility

Accessibility represents Quest's commitment to addressing the systemic barriers experienced by its target population. These barriers, whether rooted in attitudinal, historical, social, or economic factors, prevent people from accessing the same resources and opportunities, including health, that are available to other members of society. Breaking down these barriers is an essential process to create an environment where all individuals feel welcomed, respected and supported, and touches every aspect of Quest's work, from program design and services to physical spaces, outreach, partnerships communication and staffing.



People Focus

Quest places people, including both clients and staff, at the centre of everything it does. For clients this means providing health care that is respectful and adaptable to their unique circumstances and preferences. For staff it means recognizing that a motivated and supported team is essential to delivering quality health care. This implies that Quest is committed to fostering a positive work environment, promoting collaboration, communication, and ensuring staff have the resources, training, and support they need.

Collaboration

Quest recognizes that collaboration—both within the organization and across the broader health care system—is essential to improving health outcomes for individuals with complex health needs. Internally, collaboration within and between teams ensures that clients receive comprehensive, well-coordinated care. Externally, Quest partners with other organizations in the health system and beyond, including other CHCs in the Niagara region and elsewhere, to share best practices, improve service delivery, advocate for system-wide improvements, develop innovative solutions and optimize resources. Effective collaboration is essential to avoid duplication and achieve results that extend beyond any single organization's reach.

Responsiveness

Quest recognizes that change, innovation, and growth are integral to achieving long-term improvements to the health of its target population, as health care needs, best practices, and system dynamics are constantly evolving. Responsiveness means continuously listening to its clients and ensuring that services remain relevant, effective, and accessible.

STRATEGIES

Quest has identified three strategies to pursue in order to achieve its objectives.

1

HIGH-QUALITY PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Provide high-quality, accessible primary health care that is responsive to the evolving needs and characteristics of its clients and community.

- Engage with the community to build a clear and nuanced understanding of the health needs, trends, and characteristics of the clients and community served by Quest.
- Continuously improve service quality and accessibility to support better health outcomes and client experience, incorporating current best practices and innovations.
- Reach out to clients, directly or through partnerships, to bring Quest's services to those who need them, where they need them.
- Build a strong evidence base to demonstrate Quest's impact on individuals, equity deserving populations, and the broader health system.

This strategy reflects the core of Quest's work: to provide primary health care services that improve health outcomes of its priority population. Quest serves people with complex health needs and ensuring the quality of the services they receive is essential to achieve results and requires specialized and evolving technical expertise. Further, a large part of Quest's priority population faces structural, social, and economic barriers to health care. Therefore, ensuring accessibility and responsiveness is another key element of Quest's work, which requires an active and ongoing commitment to building connections with the populations served and strengthening Quest's knowledge of their changing conditions, experiences, and needs.

Understanding the needs and realities of the people Quest serves begins with meaningful engagement. Listening to clients and community members helps ensure services are relevant and aligned with their characteristics and experiences. It also builds trust, enhances visibility, and strengthens Quest's relationships within the broader community, which is essential to maintaining support.

Further, it is important to note that improving access means more than reducing wait times or simplifying processes. For many clients, physical location, transportation, as well as individual characteristics and experiences make it difficult or impossible to access services. Reaching those clients may require bringing services closer to them, offering care in more flexible ways, and working with partners they already trust.

Providing high-quality care requires a deliberate focus on learning and improvement. Best practices in health care provision as well as in related technologies evolve quickly. Thus, explicitly committing to promoting a culture and practice of continuous improvement ensures that Quest remains current, effective, and efficient in bringing about lasting change for its clients and the health system. This approach also supports staff development and contributes to building a more positive client experience.

Finally, strong evidence is essential to support continuous improvement, inform decision-making, and demonstrate impact. A well-developed evidence base will help Quest understand what is working, where gaps exist, and how to best allocate limited resources. It will also enable the organization to clearly articulate its contributions to improved health outcomes among clients, priority populations and the broader health care system, strengthening its position with collaborators, funders, and policymakers.

2 STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

Work collaboratively to strengthen Niagara’s health system so it can better support individuals with complex health needs in the Niagara region.

- Identify and build priority partnerships based on their potential impact, considering the strengths, limitations, and mandate of all partners involved, including Quest.
- Strengthen Quest’s leadership within the Niagara Ontario Health Team in supporting equity deserving populations and individuals with complex needs by facilitating dialogue, coordination, the development of new initiatives, and knowledge exchange.
- Implement targeted community capacity development initiatives to promote a collective approach to supporting individuals with complex health needs.
- Anchor Quest’s communications and positioning in its impact on its priority population, the broader community, and overall health system objectives.

Quest recognizes that for its priority population to achieve meaningful and lasting changes in their health and well-being, the broader health system needs to formulate a collective response. In line with its dedication to health equity and leveraging its understanding of the social determinants of health, this strategy frames Quest’s commitment to play a leadership role in creating the systemic conditions needed to improve health outcomes for individuals with complex health needs in the Niagara region. This includes working within the health system as well as across sectors to improve coordination, reduce gaps, and align resources to better serve equity-deserving populations.

Establishing effective partnerships is a critical first step. While Quest already collaborates with a variety of organizations, this strategy calls for a more deliberate approach that prioritizes partnerships based on shared objectives and complementary strengths. Strategic alignment with the right partners will allow Quest to expand its impact, avoid duplication, and create more efficient and effective pathways for care. These partnerships should be built with a clear understanding of each organization’s mandate, expertise, and capacity.

Further, within the health system, the Niagara Ontario Health Team (OHT) is a key forum for coordination, system development, and the creation of new programs. As Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) continue to grow in scope and mandate, the Niagara OHT is expected to continue consolidating its role as a key platform for health system development, coordination, and the integration of health services across the region. Quest’s continued leadership in the Niagara OHT, thus, will be essential to ensuring that the needs of equity deserving populations and individuals with complex health needs remain a priority. Focusing on its niche and value added, Quest can assume leadership by sharing knowledge, information, and resources,

supporting the development of joint initiatives and funding proposals, fostering dialogue and advocacy, and strengthening the alignment of services around the needs of its priority populations.

As a Community Health Centre, Quest has a mandate to share knowledge, build understanding, and support the broader system in meeting the needs of its priority populations. By helping partners and service providers deepen their understanding of the needs, characteristics, and experiences of individuals with complex health needs, Quest can foster a more informed and coordinated community response. These efforts not only strengthen individual partnerships but also support a culture of shared responsibility and continuous learning across the region.

Finally, achieving impact at a system level requires more than technical collaboration. It also depends on communication and positioning. Quest must continue to communicate clearly and consistently about its role, value, and impact. Establishing a strong, recognizable identity as a leader in complex care reinforces the organization's influence and strengthens its ability to shape policy, attract resources, and build meaningful partnerships. Clear communication based on results is therefore an essential tool that supports the success of all other elements under this strategy.

3 ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

Continue building a high performing organization that reflects its community and remains a great place to work.

- Strengthen Quest's relationship and alignment with funders, especially at the provincial and local level, to ensure its resources keep pace with service growth and Quest's staffing, facilities, and operational needs.
- Nurture an inclusive organizational culture based on communication, continuous learning, innovation, and commitment to Quest's goals and each other.
- Enhance the organization's processes, operations, and managerial and physical structures to improve service integration, results, and the usage of resources.

Quest has a strong track record of effectively adapting to evolving challenges, needs, and contexts. This strategy reaffirms Quest's commitment to maintain and strengthen its organizational capacity in a context of rising demand and ongoing change in the health system. In this context, Quest must continue to grow, preserving its core strengths while improving its internal systems and structures within its resource constraints. This requires careful attention to resources, people, processes, and infrastructure, with a focus on creating a supportive and high-performing work environment.

Securing adequate funding is a critical part of sustaining and growing the organization's impact. In recent years, resource constraints have presented challenges to the whole health system, including community-based providers like Quest, particularly as demand for services has increased. To ensure stability and long-term capacity, Quest must reinforce its relationships with funders at both the provincial and local levels as well as explore the diversification of its funding sources. This includes securing and expanding operational funding to meet service delivery and staffing needs, as well as exploring targeted fundraising to support strategic investments, such as moving to a new building.



Internally, Quest recognizes that its greatest strength lies in its people. Fostering a positive, inclusive, and team-oriented workplace culture is therefore essential. Given the integrated and interdisciplinary nature of its services, strong communication and shared purpose across teams are foundational to success. Encouraging continuous learning and innovation ensures that Quest stays at the forefront of best practices while also supporting staff development and retention. As Quest's work grows in scope and complexity, it is essential that everyone within the organization understands and is empowered to contribute to its goals.

To support this, Quest will continue to improve its internal systems, operational processes, and governance structures. These enhancements are necessary to support better coordination, more efficient use of resources, and stronger outcomes for clients. Quest will take intentional steps—such as updating policies and implementing targeted recruitment initiatives—to build a workforce that better reflects the community it serves. The organization recognizes the value of lived experience and diverse backgrounds in enhancing the accessibility, responsiveness, and quality of care. Further, it is important to note that organizational improvements must be realistic, sustainable and calibrated to the resources available. A key initiative in this area is the planned move to a new building, an investment that would enable more integrated service delivery, a more collaborative work environment, and improved accessibility for clients.

CONCLUSION

This strategic plan lays out a path to guide Quest Community Health Centre over the next few years, from 2026 to 2029. It's rooted in Quest's values and long-term goals, and it focuses on the essential elements of its purpose: delivering health care to those who need it most, working closely with partners, and continuing to grow as a strong, resilient organization.

This plan is based on extensive and rigorous research, while also reflecting the input of clients, partner organizations, service providers, and others with an interest in the health and well-being of Niagara residents. Most importantly, the plan was shaped by Quest itself through the contribution of its staff, leadership, and Board members, whose ideas, experience, and knowledge of the work were central to creating a plan that fits the organization and the communities it serves.

To make sure the strategic plan will lead to results, it will be supported by two tools: an implementation plan that lays out key activities that Quest will undertake over the next three years, and a measurement framework to track progress along the way.

Finally, the plan isn't just about setting goals and directions, it's also meant to be a document to which Quest can return over time. As new issues arise or circumstances change, the plan can help the organization stay focused on what it is trying to achieve, while giving it the flexibility to respond to new challenges and opportunities.

With this strategy in place, Quest is ready to move forward, while being clear about its priorities, and committed to making a real difference in the lives of the people it serves.

REFERENCES

The list below indicates the key sources of information consulted in the preparation of this strategic plan, excluding documents provided by Quest about its operations, governance, programs, projects, results, finances, and staffing. *All links were last accessed on 24 April 2025.*

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