

# Health Sciences North 2026 Annual Meeting

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Report from the President & CEO  
**David McNeil**



Good evening everyone,

And thank you, Chair Laughren, for your leadership and for outlining the important work of the Board over the past year.

As you heard, HSN continues to play a critical role across Northeastern Ontario not only as a hospital, but as a regional centre for specialized care, research, education, and innovation.

Tonight, I would like to reflect on the progress we have made over the past year, the challenges facing healthcare in Northern Ontario, and why this moment is so important for the future of our organization and the communities we serve.

Across Ontario, healthcare organizations are being asked to do more than ever before.

At HSN, we are serving a growing and aging populations. We are responding to increasing complexity of care with higher rates of hospitalization, rising mental health and addictions needs, persistent workforce shortages impacting the sector, and growing demand for specialized services closer to home.

At the same time, Northern Ontario is entering a period of significant economic growth tied to mining, critical minerals, and industrial expansion. As noted earlier this year by Greater Sudbury Mayor Paul Lefebvre, Sudbury is one of Canada's most important critical mineral hubs, producing and refining nickel, copper and other critical minerals essential to national and provincial priorities with 6 new mines slated to open by 2031.

This past year marked an important philosophical shift for HSN, from a regional hospital to a critical part of Ontario's healthcare system, preparing for the future of healthcare in Northern Ontario.

Earlier this year, we launched our Together For You 2030, our new strategic plan focused on strengthening care, supporting our workforce, advancing research and education, and preparing for the next generation of healthcare in the North through partnerships.

Most importantly, we continued advancing a broader vision: building a stronger, more connected healthcare system for Northern Ontario.

### **Delivering Better Care**

At the centre of everything we do is the patient experience.

This year, we saw encouraging improvements in patient experience across several inpatient programs, reflecting the dedication and compassion of our physicians, staff, and care teams.

Patient satisfaction exceeded expectations, with results ranging from 82% to over 90%, outperforming both our targets and peer organizations.

We also introduced more real-time patient feedback processes to help us identify concerns earlier and improve responsiveness while care is being delivered.

At the same time, we know there is still important work ahead.

Like hospitals across Ontario, our Emergency Department continues to experience significant pressures related to patient flow and inpatient capacity.

Every day, our Emergency Department sees more than 200 patient visits. Yet by early morning, an average of 25 admitted patients are still waiting in the Emergency Department for an inpatient bed. That number that peaked at 49 patients earlier this year.

With only 36 treatment spaces in the Emergency Department, this effectively means many days we are operating with just 11 spaces available to care for more than 200 patients. Yet we have made significant improvement, reducing the 90th percentile Time to Inpatient Bed from 43 hours to 32 hours over the past year. While this progress is substantial, the current situation is not sustainable for patients, families, or staff.

These challenges are not the result of a lack of commitment from our teams. They reflect broader healthcare system capacity pressures and reinforce why investment in infrastructure, patient flow, and redevelopment is so critically important for Northern Ontario.

Despite these realities, our teams continue to provide exceptional care under extraordinarily difficult circumstances every single day.

### **Supporting the Workforce of the North**

Healthcare is ultimately powered by people.

Across the country, workforce pressures remain one of the defining challenges facing healthcare systems today. At HSN, we know the experience of our staff and physicians directly shapes the experience of our patients.

This year, we expanded leadership development, wellness supports, staff engagement initiatives, and workplace safety efforts to better support our teams during a period of continued pressure and change.

We also heard directly from more than 1,800 staff and nearly 200 physicians through our engagement survey. Their feedback reinforced both the incredible dedication of our teams and the importance of continuing to improve psychological safety, wellbeing, and workplace culture.

As an academic health sciences centre, we also play a critical role in training the next generation of healthcare professionals for the North.

This year, we expanded learner opportunities, rural clinical placements, simulation-based education, and regional training partnerships designed to strengthen healthcare workforce pipelines across Northern Ontario.

We know that healthcare professionals who train in the North are far more likely to stay in the North and that is essential to the long-term sustainability of healthcare across our region.

Over the past three years, our staff retention rate has grown from 83% in 2023/24 to 92% as of February 2026: a 9% increase that reflects the real impact of investing in our people.

### **Research, Innovation, and Regional Leadership**

HSN's role as an academic health sciences centre is becoming increasingly important to the future of healthcare in the North.

This year, we continued advancing regional partnerships focused on research, education, workforce development, and clinical innovation across Northern Ontario.

Research and innovation are essential to improving patient outcomes, attracting talent, expanding specialized care, and strengthening healthcare sustainability across the region.

We also continued advancing digital modernization initiatives and regional collaboration designed to support safer, more connected care delivery across Northeastern Ontario.

### **Equity, Partnership, and Reconciliation**

Healthcare equity and reconciliation must be reflected not only in our values, but in how care is experienced by the communities we serve.

Over the past year, we strengthened engagement with Indigenous, Francophone, and community partners to help ensure care delivery and organizational planning are informed by the voices and experiences of those communities.

In partnership with Indigenous communities and our Indigenous Health Advisory Council, we continued advancing work focused on culturally safer care environments, Indigenous-informed research, and stronger collaboration in decision-making.

Reconciliation is an ongoing commitment grounded in listening, humility, trust, and action.

## **Building the Future of Healthcare in Northern Ontario**

And as we support teams now, we're also focussed heavily on the future.

By 2043, Northern Ontario's population is expected to grow by 20%, particularly among seniors over the age of 70, as well as among children, youth, and younger adults.

These changing demographics are increasing demand for emergency care, inpatient services, chronic disease management, pediatrics, mental health services, and substance use treatment.

The healthcare system of the future will need to respond to all of these pressures simultaneously.

HSN in its current state was not designed for the realities of the decades ahead.

The redevelopment of HSN represents one of the most important healthcare infrastructure investments in Northern Ontario in a generation.

This work is about modernizing care environments with single rooms to prevent the spread of infection, expanding bed capacity to more than 780 beds, improving patient experience, supporting innovation, and ensuring patients can access specialized care closer to home.

The need is especially urgent in Mental Health and Addictions care.

Today, our Acute Inpatient Psychiatry program remains spread across multiple sites, including a facility originally built in the 1940s that was never designed for modern mental healthcare.

Only 13 of our 60 psychiatry beds are in private rooms, and important services like Withdrawal Management continue to operate in crowded and aging leased facilities.

These challenges exist at a time when Sudbury's drug toxicity death rate remains more than three times the provincial average.

Redevelopment creates an opportunity to finally advance the original vision of integrated, specialized hospital with modern mental health and addictions care on one site, with facilities designed around dignity, recovery, safety, and better patient outcomes.

Our pediatric programs face similar pressures.

While our pediatric inpatient spaces were designed as family-friendly environments, many outpatient pediatric services have expanded over time into adult clinical areas that were never designed for children and families.

At the same time, approximately 6,000 families continue to leave the region each year to access pediatric specialty care elsewhere.

Redevelopment provides an opportunity to create modern, integrated pediatric environments that allow more children and families to receive specialized care closer to home.

The pressures created by aging infrastructure extend far beyond patient care areas alone.

Our Energy Plant, originally built in the 1970s, is considered at high risk for major infrastructure failure, a reality underscored during the significant weather event experienced in late 2024.

We are also facing infrastructure limitations in critical operational areas such as our Medical Device Reprocessing Department, where Accreditation findings were directly linked to facility and system constraints rather than staff performance.

These are clear indicators of infrastructure that was built for a different era of healthcare.

Redevelopment is ultimately about ensuring that the healthcare system serving Northeastern Ontario is modern, resilient, safe, and capable of meeting future demands and population growth.

### **Financial Stewardship and Community Partnership**

This year, focused operational management, strong financial leadership, and continued advocacy with the provincial government to stabilize our financial position and exceed targets within the first year of our recovery plan.

While challenges remain across the sector for funding, HSN has finished this year with a modest surplus.

Through very positive engagement and collaboration with the Ministry of Health, we also secured an additional \$30 million for our operational budget. I want to thank Ministry Sylvia Jones for working with us to find greater long-term financial sustainability.

The future of healthcare in Northern Ontario will also depend on strong partnerships, philanthropy, and community support.

HSN is incredibly fortunate to have an exceptional partnership with the HSN Foundation and a community that continues to believe in the importance of advancing healthcare, research, and innovation across our region.



Government funding supports core infrastructure and operations, but philanthropy helps make excellence possible — supporting innovation, advanced technology, research, and transformational projects that directly improve patient care.

### **Looking Ahead**

The work underway at HSN is about more than responding to today's pressures.

It is about building the healthcare system Northern Ontario will need in the future, one that is more connected, more innovative, more equitable, and better equipped to serve communities across our region.

HSN is more than a hospital.

It is one of Northern Ontario's most important public institutions, advancing healthcare, education, research, employment, and innovation across the region we serve.

And while significant challenges remain, I have never been more confident in our people, our partnerships, and our shared future.

Thank you.