

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NISA Launches Peer Navigator Program for HSN's Emergency Department**

*Mental Health and Addictions Patients can now receive mental health peer support in the waiting room*

**Sudbury, ON– A new program through NISA, the Northern Initiative for Social Action, will help improve accessibility for people presenting with mental health or addictions challenges to the emergency department at Health Sciences North.**

With the new Peer Navigator Program, these patients will have access to dedicated support navigating the hospital setting during a crisis, and a chance to discuss strategies for recovery. This support will come from a peer navigator, a specialized role that combines the navigator's own personal mental health experiences along with applied work in mental health care, allowing them to offer an effective complement to traditional clinical care.

"Our peer navigators offer support based in safety and as equals, without judgment, stigma or labels. They will point out resources in the community that are also available once a person is discharged from the hospital. Patients will be put more at ease and reminded that they aren't alone," says Dinah Laprairie, NISA's executive director.

Staff with HSN's Emergency Department welcome the launch of the Peer Navigator Program as patients with mental health challenges often say visits to the ED can be stressful and intimidating, especially if they are in crisis.

"The benefits of having a dedicated resource who is familiar with the healthcare system to offer comprehensive patient-centred assistance within and when navigating outside the hospital cannot be overstated," said Crystal Pitfield, emergency department clinical manager at HSN. "The peer navigator role demonstrates the ideal support during an emergency visit — a person solely dedicated to you who listens and offers their time and support."

A similar program has been operating successfully for eight years at the North Bay Regional Health Centre in collaboration with, People for Equal Partnership in Mental Health, or PEP, one of our country's oldest peer support organizations.

"Peer navigators offer immediate emotional support and help strengthen supportive pathways," said Joel Johnson the peer support navigator lead at PEP. "The program has been proven to reduce repeat visits, increase the number of referrals to community providers, and lower wait times, relieving some of the pressures in the emergency department creating a standard of best practices."

In 2018, the North East Local Health Integration Network (NE LHIN), with the support of its Regional Mental Health and Addictions Advisory Council, undertook research looking at best-practices for delivering a Peer Support Navigator program in an emergency department, along with a health equity evaluation. This past spring, the NE LHIN invested to bring the program to three larger hospitals in Northeastern Ontario. HSN's is the first to get up and running.

“Not only is the program helping people who are coming to the ED with mental health and addiction challenges, but it’s creating stronger partnerships and linkages between our hospitals and community-run peer support organizations like NISA,” said Stephanie Paquette, mental health and addictions lead at the North East LHIN. “PEP has provided inspiration and leadership in helping to roll out this program offering both hard data as well as compelling stories from people on how it has helped them.”

A peer navigator is now available at HSN’s Emergency Department daily from 2:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.

NISA is a peer-run mental health organization located in downtown Sudbury. Peers work together to support each other through active living, creative expression and occupational/vocational programming. It supports up to 70 members daily. Its hours are Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. with evening support groups for families, mothers experiencing mood changes, and those with thoughts of suicide. For more information visit [www.nisa.on.ca](http://www.nisa.on.ca) and/or follow NISA on Facebook @nisasudbury.

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