

For Immediate Release

Delivering Solutions: An Action Plan for Sustaining Rural Birthing in Northern Ontario

21 November 2024 – Today, only nine rural hospital sites supported by approximately 35 rural family physicians are providing labour and delivery services to the 50,000 rural Northern Ontarians of childbearing age. Twenty years ago, there were 20 rural hospital sites providing labour and delivery services. Twenty years before that, nearly every hospital in Northern Ontario had these services.

Northern Policy Institute's latest publication, *Delivering Solutions: An Action Plan for Sustaining Rural Birthing in Northern Ontario*, presents a plan to address the decline of rural labour and delivery services and support the sustainability of the few programs that remain operational.

"We fully endorse Ontario's stated goal of '*...giving you the right care in the right place, providing faster access to services, and growing our health care workforce...*'", says Dr. Eliseo Orrantia, a co-author of the report and a rural generalist physician in Marathon, ON with 25 years of experience in providing labour and delivery care. "Yet, as rural labour and delivery programs continue to close across Northern Ontario, pregnant persons face longer travel times to access care, resulting in worse health outcomes and substantial costs for both patients and the healthcare system. Our report outlines strategies to prevent further closures and ensure that care remains accessible where it's needed most - closer to home."

Annually, out-of-pocket medical travel costs for pregnant persons in rural northern Ontario are estimated to reach up to \$5.7 million. Additionally, the healthcare system bears a significant financial burden from managing complications in newborns and mothers caused by the necessity of traveling for care.

The report's authors highlight many of the root causes underlying the closure of labour and delivery services in rural Northern Ontario hospitals and identify potential solutions. They recommend turning these findings into action. This means the development of a government-backed regional strategic plan for rural obstetrics to help sustain and support the remaining labour and delivery programs operational across the rural North.

"This report and its associated action plan is just the first step. It's really a call, a plea, for the development of a full strategic plan to sustain and support rural obstetrics - one that is clear, actionable, and responsive to the needs of the region," says Orrantia.

Want to learn more about creative ways we can sustain and improve obstetrical care in rural Northern Ontario? Read the report: <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/delivering-solutions>

Media Interviews: co-author *Eliseo Orrantia, MD, MSc* is available for comment. To arrange an interview, please contact:

Charles Cirtwill, NPI, President & CEO
1-807-632-7999
ccirtwill@northernpolicy.ca

About the Authors:

Eliseo Orrantia, MD, MSc, is a Professor at Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) University and a longtime rural generalist physician in the Northern Ontario community of Marathon. He is one of two physicians in this community that provide labour and delivery services. Eliseo has an ongoing interest and involvement in rural obstetrics research as a tool for advocacy. His firsthand experience and scholarly work provide an informed perspective, advocating for sustainable solutions to ensure the continuation of this essential health-care service for rural communities in Northern Ontario

Iain R. Lamb, PhD, is a senior Research Associate at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) University. His research is primarily focused on identifying strategies to improve health-care access, elevate care standards, and enhance the recruitment and retention of health-care staff in Northern Ontario's rural communities. Collaborating closely with health-care practitioners, policymakers, and the communities in question, Iain is committed to formulating practical strategies to ensure that all residents in these areas have equal and equitable access to care.

About Northern Policy Institute:

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent, evidence-driven think tank. We perform research, analyze data, and disseminate ideas. Our mission is to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts our communities, our province, our country, and our world.

We believe in partnership, reconciliation, collaboration, communication, and cooperation. Our team seeks to do inclusive research that involves broad engagement and delivers recommendations for specific, measurable action. Our success depends on our partnerships with other entities present in or passionate about Northern Ontario.

Based in Thunder Bay and Kirkland Lake, NPI is active in every region of Northern Ontario. During the summer months, we have satellite offices in communities across Northern Ontario staffed by teams of Experience North placements. These placements are university and college students working in your community on issues important to you and your neighbours.