

# ALMONTE OFFICE CLOSURE EVALUATION RESULTS

## INTRODUCTION

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In February 2009 the Health Unit closed its Almonte office. This decision was made by the Board of Health as part of the annual budget planning process. The rationale for the closure of the Almonte office was primarily financial. Due to a variety of factors, the Health Unit found itself in financial difficulties heading into 2009, and the office closure was chosen as a strategy to prevent downsizing of human resources.

At the time of the closure, the Health Unit had been planning to move out of the Almonte office location at the hospital and to renovate rental property within the town of Carleton Place. The Health Unit was going to have to incur an increase in costs in order to move to the new location in Carleton Place, and once budget discussions started for 2009 it became evident that an office in Carleton Place was no longer a viable option. It had already been decided that remaining in the current Almonte office location at the hospital was unacceptable, due to health and safety concerns of the staff.

Even though the Almonte office has closed its doors to the public, it remains a service delivery site in the community. The purpose of this report is to describe how service delivery has changed to Almonte and the surrounding municipalities since the closure of the office and to measure the impact of the office closure on:

- onetime costs
- operating costs
- efficiency and effectiveness of client service delivery
- accessibility to clients and the public
- staff morale

The results will be used to make improvements to service delivery in Almonte and the surrounding municipalities, as well as to help make decisions about service delivery in other Health Unit outer offices.

## METHODS

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A variety of methods were used to gather information on the various components of the evaluation.

### Accessibility to clients and the public

#### Methods:

- 1.0 A survey was developed assessing clients' awareness of the office closure, their use of Health Unit services before and after the office closure and their perception of the impact of the closure on their personal health and on the community's health. These surveys were distributed at Almonte and Carleton Place H1N1 vaccination clinics in November 2009; clients were invited to complete a survey as they were receiving their proof of immunization record. As well, the survey was posted on the Health Unit's website using Survey Monkey for the general public to complete. An article promoting the online survey and explaining how to complete it appeared in the local Carleton Place-Almonte newspaper (*The Canadian-Gazette*).
- 2.0 A survey was developed for individuals to complete at the Township of Mississippi Mills Office, the pick-up/drop-off location for well water testing. The survey asked respondents how frequently they sample their well water, as well as questions about the convenience of the new location and hours for water bottle pick-up/drop-off and suggestions for improving the service.

### Review of One-Time and Operating Costs

#### Methods:

- 3.0 A retrospective review of costs was completed by the Director of Corporate Services.

### Efficiency and Effectiveness of Client Service Delivery

#### Methods:

- 4.0 Reviews of mileage before and after the Almonte office closure as well as a review of Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) postpartum visits before and after the Almonte office closure were completed.

### Staff Perceptions and Morale

#### Methods:

- 5.0 All staff that provided and/or supported services in Lanark County before and after the Almonte office closure were invited to complete a survey using Survey Monkey. The survey asked questions about staffs' perceptions of effectiveness, efficiency, and accessibility of service delivery since the Almonte office closure, perceptions about how the closure affected the health of the community, how the closure affected staff personally, and suggestions to improve service delivery.

## RESULTS

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Below is a description of the services that were previously offered out of the Almonte office and how these services are now delivered to the residents of Almonte and the surrounding municipalities. The data on the impact of the office closure will follow.

### Description of Service Delivery Changes

**Reception Services:** When the Almonte office was open, there was 1 FTE office assistant position in the Almonte office, who served as the receptionist and provided support and information (i.e. pamphlets, newsletters, verbal response to questions) to clients who would walk into the office and to the program staff who worked out of the office. Reception services no longer exist in the Almonte office service delivery site. A phone is maintained in the office for staff to use when they are providing services; however, this is not a public number. When the office closed residents were instructed to call the Smiths Falls office phone number. The reception position was transferred to the Smiths Falls office.

For the **Family Health Department**, the Almonte office served Mississippi Mills, Carleton Place and the northern half of Lanark County. Three Public Health Nurse (PHN) positions were filled by 5 staff (2 job share positions). One of the positions was funded by HBHC. The Almonte office served a catchment area that included Carleton Place, Pakenham and all the way to White Lake. Services provided by this department included: Baby Talk, Good Food for a Healthy Baby, Postpartum Depression support group, 48-hour phone call and postpartum home visit funded by HBHC, and Prenatal Classes.

Since the closure of the Almonte office all three PHN positions were moved to the Smiths Falls office. Immediately following the decision to close the Almonte office, one PHN moved back to her former position in the Department of Clinical Services in the Smiths Falls office, as the advantage of living and working in Almonte no longer existed. Since the closure of the Almonte office, service to the Mississippi Mills, Carleton Place and the northern half of Lanark County has been provided from Smiths Falls. Family Health maintained a PHN presence and have met the needs of the community by offering all previous services. The amount of service required in this large growing community has necessitated the use of all PHNS from the Smiths Falls office, resulting in more PHNS being familiar with this area. Prenatal classes had been provided in the Fairview Manor space until the April 2010 series, when increased numbers necessitated a move to a larger space in Carleton Place. Baby Talk continues to be held in Fairview Manor but we are currently looking for a larger space to meet the needs of our growing client population.

The **Health Promotion Department** had one FTE PHN working from the Almonte office. A variety of programs and services were provided to the North Lanark area, including services to schools, workplaces and the community-at-large. When the office closed, this position was moved to the Smiths Falls office and provided with a laptop and VPN access from home (located in the Almonte area).

The **Clinical Services Department** offered sexual health and immunization services from the Almonte office, using 1 PHN who was located in the office. Also, vaccine was stored in the Almonte office, which served as a pick-up site for area physicians.

Once the office closed, the PHN was moved to the Smiths Falls office and set-up with a laptop and VPN access from home. The clinic services have continued at the hospital since the Almonte office closed. The health unit and physicians share the cost of directly delivering the vaccine to Health Care Professional offices.

**Health Protection Department** staff are located centrally in the Smiths Falls office (8 PHIs and 2 support staff). Health Protection services are delivered as follows: service to walk in clients, especially pick up and drop off of water bottles; inspection and investigation visits to establishments within municipalities/townships (both routine inspections and demand inspections); presentations to community groups; and attendance at municipal or township meetings on environmental health issues. When the Almonte office was open, the receptionist facilitated the pick-up and drop-off of water bottles.

With the closure, this service was moved to the Mississippi Mills municipal office. Remaining health protection services continue to be offered out of the Smiths Falls office as they were before the Almonte office was closed. Land control applications, can now be hand delivered to our Smiths Falls office or forwarded by mail.

One unexpected outcome of the closure of the office has occurred when staff who live in North Lanark and originally worked in the Almonte office resign and new staff are recruited to replace them. Since the location of the vacant position is now in the Smiths Falls office, applicants for the position usually live in the Smiths Falls area, resulting in less representation of North Lanark residents among health unit staff. This, over time, will result in less connection between health unit staff and the Almonte community.

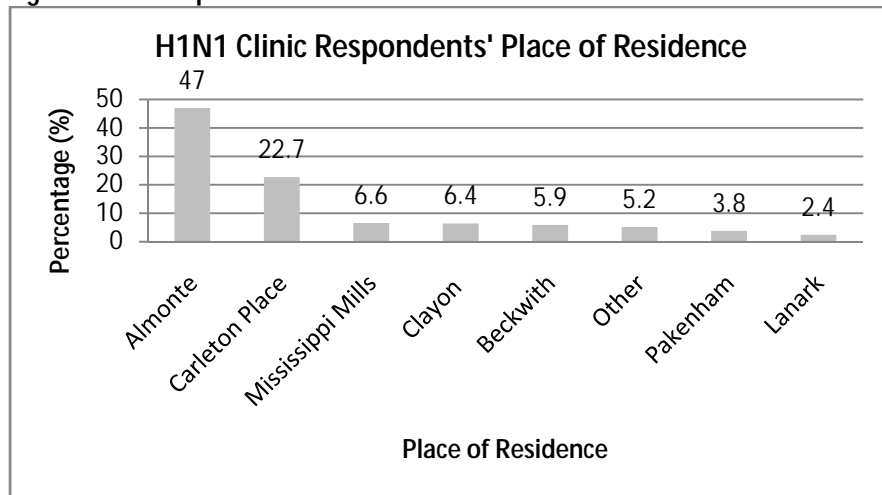
## Accessibility to clients and the public

### 1.0 Client Surveys: Results

A total of 425 clients completed surveys at the Almonte and Carleton Place H1N1 vaccination clinics. Two-thirds of the respondents (n=288) completed the survey at the Almonte clinic and one-third (n=137) completed the survey at the Carleton Place clinic. An additional 48 individuals completed surveys using Survey Monkey on the Health Unit's website.

Approximately half of the respondents from the H1N1 clinics selected Almonte as the community they live in, or live closest to. In contrast, approximately two-thirds of Survey Monkey respondents selected Almonte as the community they live in, or live closest to. Figure One, below, illustrates where H1N1 clinic respondents reported living.

Figure One: Respondents' Place of Residence



**'Other' locations:**  
 White Lake, Ottawa,  
 Calabogie, Perth, Carp,  
 Kinburn, Stittsville, Smiths  
 Falls, Appleton,  
 Drummond/North  
 Emsley, Ashton, and  
 Innisville

Clients were first asked if they were aware that the Almonte office had closed. A total of 58.8% of clients at H1N1 clinics indicated that they were aware of the office closure while 41.2% indicated they were not aware of the closure. Survey Monkey respondents appeared more aware of the closure with close to 90% indicating they were aware the office had closed. Table One, below, illustrates clients' awareness of the closure by respondent group.

Table One: Awareness of Office Closure [n (%)]

	Aware of Closure	Unaware of Closure
Almonte H1N1 Clinic	179 (62.8%)	106 (37.2%)
Carleton Place H1N1 Clinic	69 (50.4%)	68 (49.6%)
Survey Monkey	42 (89.4%)	5 (10.6%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>290 (61.8%)</b>	<b>179 (38.2%)</b>

Table One illustrates that more clients at the Almonte H1N1 clinic were aware of the Almonte office closure compared to clients at the Carleton Place H1N1 clinic. It also illustrates that almost equal proportions of clients at the Carleton Place H1N1 clinic were aware and unaware of the Almonte office closure. Unlike the clients at the H1N1 clinics, almost all of the Survey Monkey respondents were aware that the Almonte office had closed.

Next, clients were asked if they/their family had ever used Health Unit services at the Almonte office before it closed in February. Slightly more than half (52.6%) of clients at H1N1 clinics indicated that they had used Health Unit services at the Almonte office before it closed while 47.4% indicated that they had not used services before the Almonte office closed. The majority of Survey Monkey respondents (89.4%) indicated that they had used Health Unit services at the Almonte office before it closed. Table Two, below, illustrates the Health Unit services used by clients at the Almonte office before it closed.

Table Two: Services used before Almonte office closure

	H1N1 Clinic Respondents		Survey Monkey Respondents	
	n	%	n	%
Sexual health clinic	14	6.6%	16	38.1%
Immunization clinic	91	42.9%	27	64.3%
Water testing	164	77.4%	21	50.0%
Sewage application	14	6.6%	-	-
Baby Talk/Prenatal Classes	23	10.8%	12	28.6%

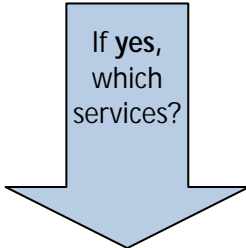
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**'Other' services** clients stated using: travel clinics, information, rabies vaccination clinics, postpartum nurse visits and TB test. As well, clients mistakenly listed other non-Health Unit services such as diabetes clinics, counseling services and cancer services.

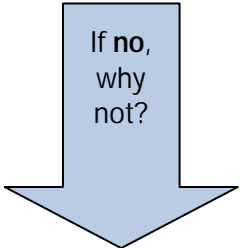
Clients were next asked if they/their family had used Health Unit services since the Almonte office closed in February.

60 (15.2%) at H1N1 clinics said YES 15 (31.9%) Survey Monkey respondents said YES	336 (84.8%) at H1N1 clinics said NO 32 (68.1%) Survey Monkey Respondents said NO
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If yes,  
which  
services?



If no,  
why  
not?



	H1N1 n (%)	Survey Monkey n (%)
Sexual health clinic	5 (8.3%)	-
Immunization clinic	47 (78.3%)	7 (47.0%)
Water testing	34 (56.7%)	-
Sewage	-	-
Baby Talk/Prenatal	-	-

'-' indicates cell count <5

	H1N1 n (%)	Survey Monkey n (%)
Services not required	182 (54.2%)	12 (37.5%)
Used similar services elsewhere	37 (11.0%)	7 (21.9%)
Unable to get to the services	23 (6.8%)	14 (43.8%)

'Other' reasons clients had not used Health Unit services since the Almonte office closed included:

- Being new to the community
- Having a physician
- Being unaware of the services available
- Being unaware of service locations (i.e. new water bottle drop-off location)

More respondents from the H1N1 clinics appear to have used Health Unit services before the Almonte office closed (52.6%) compared to after the closure (15.2%). This can likely be explained by the limited time frame since the closure; as the majority of those who had not used Health Unit services since the closure said this was because the services were not required.

The next set of questions asked clients if they felt the closure of the Almonte office had affected their/their family's health personally, and if they felt it had affected the health of their community.

**Table Three: Perception of the Personal and Community Impact of Almonte Office Closure [n (%)]**

	H1N1 Clinics		Survey Monkey	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>Do you feel the closure of the Almonte office has affected the health of you/your family personally?</b>	103 (27.5%)	272 (72.5%)	33 (71.7%)	13 (28.3%)
<b>Do you feel the closure of the Almonte office has affected the health of your community?</b>	246 (72.4%)	94 (27.6%)	37 (80.4%)	9 (19.6%)

It is interesting to note that H1N1 clients' answers for these two questions essentially reversed. About three-quarters of H1N1 clients do not feel that the closure of the Almonte office has affected their health personally, but about three-quarters of H1N1 clients feel that the closure of the Almonte office has affected the health of their community. As well, it is interesting that about three-quarters of H1N1 clients indicated that the closure of the Almonte office had not affected them personally, whereas approximately three-quarters of Survey Monkey respondents indicated that the closure had affected them personally.

It appears as though Survey Monkey respondents feel more personally affected by the Almonte office closure with over 70% indicating that the closure affected them personally and over 80% indicating the closure affected the health of their community.

Clients were asked to explain their answers and themes have been pulled out from all of the individual comments.

### **Effect on Personal Health**

- Numerous clients responded "*Not yet...*"
- Having to travel to access services increases time, planning and cost (gas)
- Travelling to access services is inconvenient and difficult for people who work, those who don't drive or who lack transportation (especially elderly, young and low income)
- No public transportation available in Lanark County
- Clients reported delays for travel consultation and vaccination
- Closure affects those without a physician and those with physicians who face long waits to get appointments
- Clients reported no longer getting water tested/testing their water less frequently
- Clients reported they are more likely to use other community services now instead of Health Unit services
- Clients can no longer drop in anytime; less convenient
- Clients worry the closure puts more pressure on other community health services, especially as the communities of Almonte and Carleton Place are growing/expanding

## Effect on Community Health

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- Numerous clients “*unsure*” of effect
- Accessibility issues (i.e. those who don’t drive/don’t have transportation, those requiring walk-in services, those without internet, those with health issues that make travelling difficult)
  - “*Public health accessibility should not be limited to those with a car*”
- Less convenient
- Concern about lack of services for teens
- Affects those without a physician
- Communication issues – unaware of new water bottle drop-off location; unsure where to go for services
- Loss of a valuable source of information (i.e. being able to drop in and pick up information)
- Smiths Falls is not central to Lanark County, especially northern part of Lanark County
  - “*The only office for Lanark County should not be located at one end of the county and should be located closer to the centre of the county’s population to reduce clients’ transportation. It is located for management’s convenience*”
- Although teens may have physicians, they may not feel comfortable accessing their services – Almonte office was ‘safe’ and reliable place for them
- Closure places pressure on other community health services
- Health professionals unable to refer clients for ‘*proactive and preventative health care*’

## Suggestions to Make Services more Accessible

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- Numerous clients suggested opening/re-opening an office in Almonte or Carleton Place; or having an office in each community/town in Lanark County
- Continue to keep Almonte office open one day per week or more
- Provide local services in the northern part of Lanark County
- ‘*Information blitz*’ in local newspapers or a mail out, as well as information to physicians’ offices re: services in Almonte area

## 2.0 Water Bottle Testing Surveys: Results

A total of 40 clients completed surveys when dropping off or picking up their well water samples at the Mississippi Mills Municipal Office. The small sample size limits the utility of the well water testing results, as well as the lack of representation from North Lanark County residents.

Approximately two-thirds (n=26) of respondents reported living in/close to Mississippi Mills (including Almonte, Pakenham, Clayton and Ramsay) and 5 reported living in/close to Carleton Place. The remaining respondents lived in/close to the following communities:

- Appleton, Ashton, Beckwith, Franktown, Lanark Highlands, Lavant, Perth, White Lake

The majority of respondents indicated that the **location** (87.5%) and the **hours** (97.5%) for water bottle pick-up and drop-off were convenient. As well, the majority (85.0%) did not have any difficulties completing the **water submission form** included with the sample.

### 3.0 Retrospective Review of Costs: Results

The Director of Corporate Services provided a retrospective summary of operating costs before and after the Almonte office closure, expressed as the average monthly. These results are illustrated in Table Four, below.

**Table Four: Comparison of Operating Costs Before and after Almonte Office Closure**

Service	Average Monthly Cost Before Closure (Almonte Office)	Potential Monthly Cost of the Carleton Place Office that was being planned	Average Monthly Cost of Service Delivery Site (After Office Closure)	Monthly Difference (Almonte office and Service Delivery Site)
Bell	\$308.60 (phone + fax)	\$308.60	\$90.92 (phone only)	-\$217.68
Rent	\$908	4,110	\$0	-\$908
Courier	\$206.73	\$206.73	\$506.73	\$300.00*
Cell Phones	\$0	\$0	\$112.80	\$112.80
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,423.33</b>	<b>\$4,316.73</b>	<b>\$710.45</b>	<b>-\$712.88</b>

\*once established the intent was to charge back the physician for delivery of the vaccine

Table 4 illustrates that the average monthly operating costs have decreased by \$712.88 since the Almonte office closure. This translates to an estimated annual savings of **\$8,554.56**. However, these costs do not include Internet before or after the closure. Courier costs before the closure include twice weekly shipments between Almonte and Brockville. Also, the space in the Almonte General Hospital where we provide clinics is currently being provided free of charge and there is no guarantee that this will not change in the future. The average increase in monthly cost to relocate to Carleton Place was going to be \$2,893.40 or **\$34,720.80** on an annual basis.

Table Five, below, illustrates that the one-time costs associated with the Almonte office closure was \$3,069.61. A minimum of \$2,500 was saved by reusing the former Almonte reception desk in Brockville in the north wing reconfiguration. The net cost to the agency was therefore \$669.61.

**Table Five: One Time Costs of Almonte Office Closure**

Service	Cost
Paint	\$59.18
Phone Disconnect	\$189.00
Phone Installation	\$321.64
Move Fridge	\$269.99
2 Tables	\$190.08
Workstation	\$768.23
Router	\$107.99
Movers	\$798.00
5 trips from Smiths Falls to Almonte re: modem	\$197.80
Setup VPN in 2 homes	\$167.70
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3069.61</b>

The total one-time costs of the Almonte office closure were **\$3,069.61**.

\*Note: Saved \$2500 by using former reception workstation in Brockville

Efficiency and Effectiveness of Client Service Delivery

**4.0 Review of Mileage: Results**

Mileage costs were reviewed for the time periods of March 1, 2008 to October 31, 2008 and March 1, 2009 to October 31, 2009. For Health Promotion and Clinical Services, only the mileage of the staff who were in positions based out of the Almonte office were included, because only the work of these positions were impacted by the closure. For Family Health, all staff who were in positions that had provided services in Lanark (out of either Almonte or Smiths Falls offices) were included, as the closure of the Almonte office impacted how the entire north team does their work. Table Six, below, illustrates the results of the service delivery mileage costs.

**Table Six : Comparison of Service Delivery Mileage Costs**

Department	Almonte Office Open	Almonte Office Closed	Difference (Before - After)
	# Kilometers Driven total Mar 1, 2008 - Oct 31, 2008	# Kilometers Driven total Mar 1, 2009 - Oct 31, 2009	
Health Promotion	7028	6190	-838
Clinical Services	2353	4691	2338
Family Health	33560	30447	-3113
<b>Total</b>	<b>42941</b>	<b>41328</b>	<b>-1613</b>

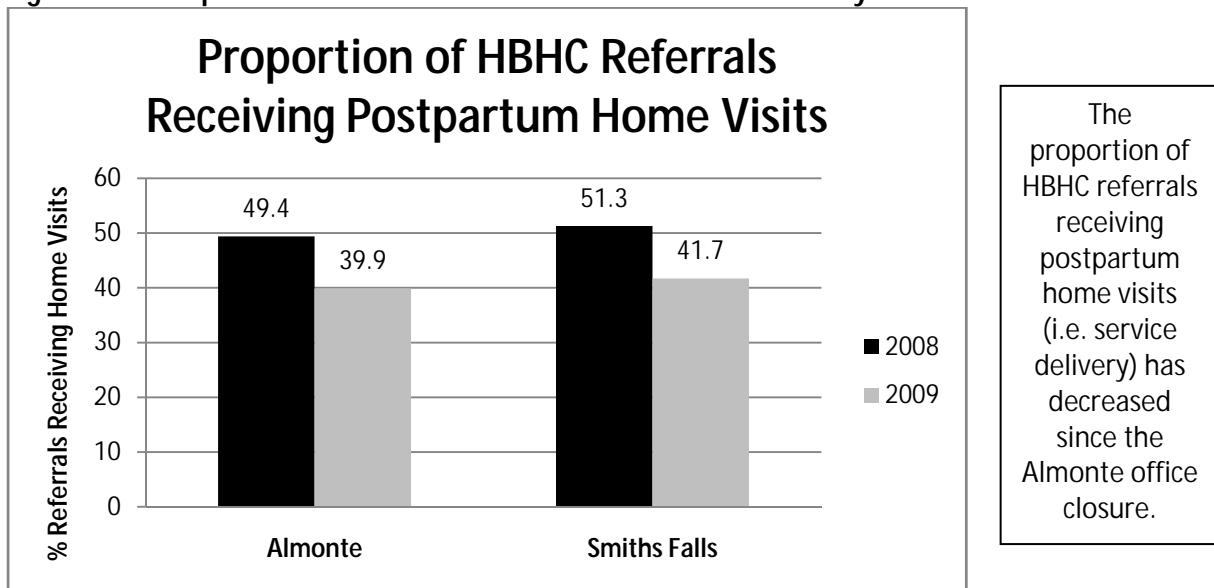
Service delivery mileage costs appear to have decreased by 1613km since the Almonte office closure. At a mileage reimbursement rate of \$ 0.47 per km, this would translate into a savings of \$758.11 for the 8-month period. Extrapolated to an annual timeframe, the mileage savings would be less than \$1200.00 per year.

However, there are numerous factors influencing the service delivery mileage result which make it difficult to attribute the decrease solely to the closure of the Almonte office. In 2009, all Moving Upstream Committee meetings and several other health unit wide committees were cancelled, which may have influenced mileage. As well, for the Family Health mileage calculation, 16 staff were included but only two staff remained in the same positions during the two time periods used to calculate mileage. Several staff were on maternity leaves, staff retired and positions were gapped to save money.

As well, there were service delivery changes in the Family Health Department between 2008 and 2009. In December 2008, the Health Unit hired Family Home Visitors instead of contracting out services to an external agency and Baby Talk in Almonte and Carleton Place increased to weekly (from biweekly) in February 2009. Both of these changes may have decreased the number of home visits made by public health nurses in Family Health, and therefore resulted in decreased mileage costs.

This result is demonstrated in Figure 2 below, which shows the proportion of Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) referrals that received postpartum home visits during the two time periods under study. As shown in Figure 2, the proportion of HBHC referrals receiving home visits has decreased in both Smiths Falls and Almonte by approximately 10%. This may have been due to the Almonte office closure, but also due to the service delivery changes discussed previously.

**Figure Two: Impact of Almonte Office Closure on Service Delivery**



Costs for the mileage of administrative staff were also calculated for Health Protection (management), Family Health (team leaders) and Corporate Services (IT) for the same time periods. These results are presented in Table Seven, below.

**Table Seven: Comparison of Administrative Mileage Costs**

Department	# Kilometers Driven to Almonte	# Kilometers Driven to Almonte
	Mar 1, 2008 - Oct 31, 2008	Mar 1, 2009 - Oct 31, 2009
Health Protection	1067	393
Family Health	1514	275
Corporate Services	1746	974
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4327</b>	<b>1642</b>

Administrative mileage costs have decreased since the Almonte office closure, for a savings of approximately \$1261.95 for the 8-month period. When added to the service delivery mileage savings of \$758.11, there is a total savings for mileage of **\$2020.06** for an 8-month period.

A non monetary efficiency that resulted from the closure of the Almonte office was the elimination of the need for a permanent receptionist for the office. This allowed the transfer of this position to Smiths Falls and the availability of an extra clerk for that very busy office.

## 5.0 Staff Survey: Results

A total of 40 staff completed the online staff survey using Survey Monkey. Approximately one-third of respondents reported working in Health Promotion, one-third reported working in Family Health, approximately 20% reported working in Clinical Services and the remainder reported working in Health Protection or Corporate Services/Quality Improvement. 23 respondents reported providing/delivering services to Lanark County residents before and after the Almonte office closure, and 28 respondents reported supporting staff in the delivery of services to residents of Lanark County.

Staff who reported providing/delivering services to residents in Lanark County before and after the Almonte office closure were asked to answer a series of open-ended questions about the effectiveness, efficiency and accessibility of service delivery since the Almonte office closure, the effect on the health of the community, the personal impact of the closure as well as suggestions to improve the delivery of Health Unit services to residents of Lanark County. Staff who reported supporting staff in the delivery of services were asked if the closure had impacted their efficiency in providing support.

**All members of Senior Management have received a document containing all anonymous comments from staff. Any personally identifying information has been removed from this document. A summary of staff comments is outlined below.**

### Impact of Almonte Office Closure on Effectiveness of Service Delivery

The majority of staff feel that the Almonte office closure has had a negative impact on the effectiveness of service delivery. Staff feel that the Almonte office provided a point of face-to-face contact and the closure represents a lost opportunity to share a wide variety of information with clients. Staff also feel that the office closure has resulted in increased travel time for both staff and clients and therefore less contact with clients and community partners. As well, staff stated that it is inequitable that Lanark County does not have an office location (as Smiths Falls is not technically part of Lanark County) despite a large population, and this has created frustration within the community and stressed relationships with community partners.

Some staff feel that the closure of the office does not impact effectiveness, and that having a full complement of staff instead of gapped positions has a greater impact on effectiveness of service delivery than the closure of the office. As well, staff commented that having space for Family Health programs such as Baby Talk and Prenatal classes in the vacated office space has been a positive impact.

### **Impact of Almonte Office Closure on Efficiency of Service Delivery**

Again, the majority of staff feel that the Almonte office closure has had a negative impact on the efficiency of service delivery. Staff perceive that they are spending more time travelling, which takes away from service delivery and also feel that clients are spending more time travelling to access services. Staff also identified issues with lacking access to Health Unit email and files when working in the Almonte space, lost forms and errors for test results due to the transportation of forms and specimens from Almonte to Smiths Falls and issues with vaccine pickup and delivery for physicians.

### **Impact of Almonte Office Closure on Accessibility of Service Delivery**

Although some staff feel the impact of the closure on accessibility of service delivery is neutral, the majority feel that the impact has been negative. Staff feel that services are less accessible for clients due to increased travel and that services such as vaccine pick up and needle exchange are less accessible as they are only available one day per week now instead of 5 days per week.

### **Impact of Almonte Office Closure on Health of Community**

The majority of staff feel that the closure of the Almonte office has negatively affected the health of the community. Staff feel that the closure has created confusion for clients and has eroded their trust and confidence in the Health Unit as well as sending a negative message. Staff also feel that being unable to drop in to schools or workplaces negatively impacts the community's health, as these groups may be unaware of the Health Unit's services and support.

### **Personal Impact of Almonte Office Closure on Staff**

Almost all staff reported feeling personally affected by the Almonte office closure. Staff miss having a professional space to use, and expressed difficulties with work from home arrangements and team functioning. Staff also expressed emotions of shame, embarrassment, and feeling emotionally drained due to the Almonte office closure.

### **Impact of Almonte Office Closure on Support Staffs' Ability to Provide Support to Staff**

Some staff noted that the Almonte office closure and relocation of staff to the Smiths Falls office has been positive as all staff are based out of one office which makes staff more accessible and has improved consistency.

Several support staff commented that the closure did not impact their ability to provide support, but did create challenges for finding venues to provide services.

The majority of staff felt that the impact of the Almonte office closure was negative due to increased travel time, lack of communication between staff about what is happening in the community and a "disconnect" felt with other staff. As well, staff explained difficulties transporting resources between Almonte and Smiths Falls, difficulties connecting with staff working from home, and dealing with clients who are dissatisfied with having to travel to Smiths Falls.

### **Suggestions to Improve the Delivery of Services to Residents of Lanark County**

Numerous staff suggested opening/reopening an office in Almonte or Carleton Place or renting space from a municipal partner in those communities to house an office. As well, staff suggested using an evidence-based decision making process or making philosophical decisions about the future of service delivery across the three counties. Staff suggested moving some staff, such as QI, IT, Nutrition and Dental to a more central location, such as Smiths Falls. Staff suggested having a safe, central and secure location for vaccine delivery and pick up, having access to Health Unit email and files in Almonte and communicating Health Unit services available to communities in Lanark County. Finally, staff suggested that departments should work together to determine space requirements and that the Health Unit should develop a 'change management strategy' for the future.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### Component: Accessibility to clients and the public

Many clients are unaware of the Almonte office closure; slightly over 60% were aware that the Almonte office had closed. Less than one-third of clients felt that the Almonte office closure had affected them personally, but close to three-quarters felt that the closure had affected the health of the community. Clients identified accessing Health Unit services and having to travel to access services as issues related to the closure of the Almonte office. As well, clients felt that Smiths Falls was not a central location for an office and numerous clients suggested opening/reopening an office in Almonte or Carleton Place. Clients were also concerned about the pressure that the Almonte office closure places on other community health services

### Component: Review of One-Time and Operating Costs

Monthly fixed operating costs have decreased by \$712.88 per month, which translates to an estimated annual savings of **\$8554.56**. One-time costs related to the closure amounted to over two-thousand dollars. Annual savings from a potential move to Carleton Place were greater, at **\$34, 720.80**.

### Component: Efficiency and Effectiveness of Client Service Delivery

Mileage appears to have decreased since the Almonte office closure and savings of just over **\$2000.00** has been estimated for service delivery and administrative mileage in an 8-month period (calculated to be approximately **\$3030** for a 12-month period). However numerous factors could have influenced the decrease in mileage costs, which cannot necessarily be attributed to the closure of the Almonte office. Service delivery, as measured by the proportion of HBHC referrals receiving postpartum visits, has decreased since the Almonte office closure, but again may not be attributable to the closure of the Almonte office. Directly attributable to the closure of the office was the staffing efficiency gained from the transfer of the receptionist from the Almonte office to a program assistant role in the Smiths Falls office.

### Component: Staff Perceptions and Morale

For the most part, staff feel that the closure of the Almonte office has had a negative impact on service delivery. Staff perceive that their travel time has increased, that staff and services are less accessible to clients, that staff are less connected to the community and that relationships with community partners have eroded. Numerous staff suggested re-opening an office in Almonte or Carleton Place.

In conclusion, this evaluation has attempted to capture data related to client accessibility, costs, efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, and staff perceptions and morale. Overall cost savings are modest, depending on whether one considers the actual savings from the closure of the Almonte office or the potential savings of the planned move to Carleton Place. It is difficult to assess efficiency using mileage as an indicator when movement within and between departments is so fluid and thus it is difficult to conclude if the Almonte office closure has resulted in efficiencies related to reduced mileage. Certainly staff perceive that they are less efficient in their work due to increased travel time, but we lack data to confirm these perceptions.

As well, without a consistent time tracking system across the Health Unit, it is again difficult to assess if the Almonte office closure has resulted in other types of service delivery or staffing efficiencies, beyond the transfer of the Almonte office receptionist to a program support role in Smiths Falls. It is clear that overall, staff morale has been negatively affected by the closure of the Almonte office and that respondents to the client survey have concerns about the potential impact of the closure on the health of the community. Both clients and staff expressed concerns about accessibility of Health Unit services for residents of Lanark County.

Therefore, when cost savings and efficiencies are estimated to be modest, one must question whether these are worth the negative impact of the closure on staff morale and public perception. As the Health Unit moves forward, it will become important to determine what is meant by service delivery and whether being accessible is more than providing direct services, such as clinics and water bottles, in a community. The value of being represented, visible and accessible in a community is difficult to measure, yet vital to future discussions regarding office locations. It is recommended that any decisions about office locations in the future be handled through a change management process that allows sufficient time to minimize disruption to service delivery and the impact on staff morale and public perception.

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