

Our History | Flip Sheet

100 YEARS OF ADVANCING URBAN HEALTH 1911 - 2011



Sir Wilfred Laurier at the official opening ceremony of the Wellesley Hospital in 1911. Dr. Bruce stands at the far left.

Humble Beginnings

In 1911 Dr. Herbert Bruce, a Toronto physician, founded the Wellesley Hospital. The private, non-profit hospital served both the city's wealthy and its poor. In the days before Medicare, Dr. Bruce believed that no one should be turned away for lack of funds, so the hospital provided affordable health care for the poor, funded through fees-for-services paid by the wealthy. The Wellesley Hospital became known for both excellent patient care and for affordable health care. During the Great Depression, Dr. Bruce — who was appointed Lieutenant Governor in recognition of his pioneering health care work — became an advocate for controversial social measures that are considered progressive today, such as housing for the poor.

The Wellesley Hospital experienced some of its most difficult times during WWI, the Great Depression, and WWII. Although financial difficulties nearly forced it to close several times, its dedicated Board and staff fought to keep the valued hospital and its well-regarded nursing school open. In 1942, the private hospital succumbed to its debt and became a public institution. Over the next 40 years, the hospital grew, both in size and in reputation.

In 1996 the Wellesley Hospital merged with Toronto's Central Hospital, which was itself noted for culturally sensitive service to immigrant communities, and the Wellesley Central Hospital was born. In 1997, Women's College Hospital also became part of Wellesley Central.

Over the years, the Wellesley Central Hospital (in its various incarnations) became known for its teaching expertise,

Historic Milestones

- 1911: Wellesley Hospital formally opens
- 1912: [First hospital wing completed](#)
- 1917: Designated a Public Hospital under the Ontario Hospital and Charitable Institutions Act
- 1932: [Dr. Bruce appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario](#)
- 1940: Dr. Bruce elected as Canadian Member of Parliament
- 1942: [Granted Public General Hospital status](#)
- 1947: Granted University of Toronto teaching hospital status
- 1948: [Becomes the Wellesley Division of the Toronto General Hospital](#)
- 1959: Regains independence from Toronto General Hospital
- 1973: [First off-site clinic opens](#)
- 1989: UofT calls for academic community health model
- 1991: [New community orientation signalled via strategic plan](#)
- 1991: Urban Health Initiative
- 1995: [District Health Council restructuring: closure proposed](#)
- 1996: Merger with Toronto Central Hospital: Wellesley Central Hospital formed
- 1997: [Merger with Women's College Hospital](#)
- 1997: Health Services Restructuring Commission's direction for closure
- 1997: [Staying Alive Campaign to save Wellesley Central](#)
- 1998: Wellesley Central Hospital ends operations
- 1999: [Wellesley Central Health Corporation is founded](#)
- 2006: Wellesley Central Health Corporation re-named The Wellesley Institute

Source: *Survival Strategies* edited by David Goyette, Dennis W. Magill and Jeff Denis

research and treatment of HIV/AIDS, and commitment to providing excellent, sensitive care to members of the city's LGBT community, and people who are poor, homeless and recent immigrants.

In 1998, despite the efforts of the local community who fought passionately for its survival, the Wellesley Central Hospital closed its doors, as directed by the Ontario Health Services Restructuring Commission, thus ending an 87-year tradition of excellence and caring.

While the operations of the hospital had come to an end, the spirit that had given it definition had not. A handful of former Board members and community activists remained determined to safeguard the legacy of the hospital, and to envision and act on a future that would bring it to life. They created the Wellesley Central Health Corporation (WCHC) to further that objective.



A 1949 graduation pin from the Wellesley Hospital's Toronto School of Nursing.



The Wellesley Central Place, a division of the Drs. Paul and John Rekaï Centre, is unlike any other long-term care home in Toronto. Designed to function as an independent village, it emphasizes wellness focusing on the capabilities of individual patients, rather than a disabilities-centred medical model.

affordable supportive housing for people with living with HIV/AIDS, and 56 units for people who are frail and elderly.

In an effort to revitalize the neighbourhood economy and create mixed housing usage, the WCHC Board also decided to sell part of its land to the Tridel Corporation for the development of private sector housing. This housing eventually took the form of a

high-rise condominium and townhouses.

The new and innovative Wellesley-Magill Park — named in joint honour of the Wellesley Hospital and Dennis Magill, then Chair of the Board, and designed by internationally acclaimed landscape architect Cornelia Oberlander — was also created as part of the plan. The public park, comprised of 100 London Plane trees, open space, and a series of small gathering places, features a Wall of Memories and commemorative plaques in honour of the former Wellesley Central Hospital and the contributions of its many staff and associates over its 87 year history.

Completed in 2010, the site initiative has given rise to a mixed-use and demographically diverse urban community of 1500 people that includes in the mix of families and single people, people who are frail and elderly, long-term care recipients, and people who are living with HIV/AIDS. It has also had a positive economic impact on local retailers, most of whom suffered an immediate downturn following the closure of the hospital.

Creating a lasting legacy

The Wellesley Central Health Corporation's Board of Directors determined that the organization's objective of creating a positive and enduring neighbourhood legacy for the former hospital could be fulfilled through a commitment to real estate development.

In 2000, the site of the former Central Hospital was sold to the Sherbourne Health Centre and the 4.3 acre Wellesley Central Hospital site (which had been temporarily occupied by St. Michael's Hospital) was handed back to WCHC for redevelopment.

A comprehensive site plan for the old hospital lands took shape under the leadership of the WCHC Board and CEO and with substantial community consultation. The plan that was ultimately approved was designed to provide a variety of neighbourhood uses, to weave carefully into the existing urban fabric, and to help maintain the site's legacy of supporting health and providing health care to the broader community.

An innovative and modernist 150-bed long-term care facility was approved by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. Known as Wellesley Central Place, it was leased to the newly independent Drs. John and Paul Rekaï Centre — the first hospital-affiliated, non-profit nursing home in Toronto — which would manage the facility in addition to its current complex at 333 Sherbourne Street. The facility would comprise 95,000 square feet and promote autonomy in a safe, therapeutic and home-like environment, and would be replete with a green roof, courtyard, and Class A self-contained units. The groundbreaking ceremony took place on July 28, 2003.

Also planned, was Wellesley Central Residence Inc., an integrated residence to be managed by Fife House and Woodgreen Community Centre. Residence Inc. would provide 56 units of

The Wellesley Institute

In 2006, the Wellesley Central Health Corporation changed its name to the Wellesley Institute, reflecting its evolution from developer to think tank. Today, the Wellesley Institute is a non-profit and non-partisan research and policy institute focused on finding solutions to problems of population health.

By 2011, the Wellesley Institute moved to new offices at 10 Alcorn Avenue to accommodate a growing staff team. Our new long-term strategic plan builds on a century-long tradition of tackling the real health issues of Torontonians.

References: Hollobon, Joan. (1987). *The Lion's Tale: A History of the Wellesley Hospital*. Toronto: Irwin Publishing.
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