

ICES STUDY REVEALS CLIENTS OF TORONTO'S COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES ARE LESS LIKELY TO USE HOSPITAL EMERGENCY SERVICES

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A new study by the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) released today has revealed that people who are clients of Toronto's Community Health Centres (CHCs) are less likely to use hospital emergency services. "Community health centres provide an effective role in promoting the health of our clients and communities. Quality comprehensive primary health care is key to a lower cost sustainable health care system," said Sheila Braidek, Executive Director of the Regent Park Community Health Centre and Co-Chair of the Community Health Centres of Greater Toronto.

"It is also good for people who are in need of care: for the senior who is seen by their physician in the home and has avoided a long wait in emergency and innumerable diagnostic tests" added Mary Jane Dykeman, Chairperson of the Anne Johnson Health Station, a community health centre serving north central Toronto; "Or for the young single mother who is concerned about her child after hours, and can use the evening hours or 24 hour physician on call service to receive care and advice rather than spending hours in an emergency waiting room", shared Andrea Cohen, CEO of the Unison Health and Community Services located in the priority neighbourhoods of North West Toronto; "Or for isolated newcomers who receive support accessing services in their own language and overcoming other barriers to service", says Moo Lay Naw, Sgaw language interpreter and peer system navigator at Access Alliance CHC.

The study's demographic analysis confirmed CHCs are proactively connecting services with populations who have traditionally faced barriers accessing primary care and whose living circumstances leave them vulnerable to poor health. According to the study: "CHCs served populations from lower income neighbourhoods, had higher proportions of newcomers and those on social assistance, had more severe mental illness and chronic health conditions...."

Based on CHC clients' characteristics, the study found that visits by CHC clients to emergency departments in Ontario was 21 per cent less than what was expected. Here in the Toronto Central LHIN, visits to emergency departments by clients was 3 per cent less than expected. "We're happy that the visits are lower than expected", said Sheila Braidek, "And there are opportunities - for example through

increased prevention and health promotion programs - to decrease utilization of emergency departments even further,” she continued. Lynne Raskin, Executive Director of the South Riverdale Community Health Centre added, “Toronto attracts a large number of people with complex needs due to the specialty services available here. We are currently exploring ways to further enhance hospital diversion with the provision of appropriate programming, services, supports and coordinated systems”.

Quick facts:

- A total of 73 CHCs serve approximately 357,000 people in 110 communities throughout Ontario. Here in the Toronto Central LHIN, 18 CHCs serve 35,957 people.
- CHCs are proactive directing services to those whose health is most at risk and are focused on lessening avoidable visits to hospital emergency departments. According to the most recent figures supplied by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the average visit to an emergency department in Ontario costs \$148.
- Other studies have confirmed CHC effectiveness. According to recent research conducted by the Élisabeth Bruyère Institute, compared to other models, CHCs deliver superior health promotion services and chronic disease prevention and management. They also do a better job orienting services to community needs.
- Governed by community members, CHCs give people a voice and a choice about the health services they receive. CHCs are also key connectors: inter-professional health teams partner with other health and social service agencies.

The ICES study can be found at: http://www.ices.on.ca/webpage.cfm?site_id=1&org_id=68

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