

Improving Awareness and Access to Community Agencies affecting the Determinants of Health

Synopsis

Community agencies and programs are put in place to improve quality of life for Canadians in a variety of ways. There are many reasons a person may seek assistance from a community agency but lack of awareness of what is available within one's community may be a large factor as to why agencies and potential consumers are under connected and potentially underfunded. Improving awareness may improve utilization and funding for community health services and promote and improve population health.

Description

There are many agencies and services in Ontario established to improve the quality of life for Ontarians. These services may be offered to those lacking in one or more of Canada's 12 determinants of Health (see appendix A).

There are a variety of reasons a person may benefit from the aid of a community health agency. One may need the support of a Community Health Nurse (CHN) following a surgery, another may need help finding housing, foods banks, a primary health provider or information and support for a recent diagnosis. As a student nurse I have been afforded the opportunity to have been placed in a variety of hospital and community settings in Windsor Ontario. I have discovered some wonderful programs and facilities in my community that I did not know existed. I am still however, finding that current program information, availability and eligibility criteria are difficult to source. I feel that if I am having difficulty finding this information potential clients are as well.

Public/ Community Health Agencies are funded in Ontario through the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) based on proven need for the service in the community and for government funds. I am proposing that all agencies and programs providing service to the public based on the 12 determinants of health register with their local public health unit and provide information about the service provided, eligibility criteria and contact information to be uploaded the LIHN website.

Each health unit will submit these services and their information to their respective LHIN. The LIHN will upload these services to this website. This website will be easy to navigate. The consumer will be able to enter the city in which services are needed. That LIHN page will be brought up. From there the 12 determinants of health will be used as headings with drop down options of services for each health determinant. The consumer will be able to click the service they require and see a list of agencies and service in their community with the information provided by the health unit.

The consumer will be able to obtain information on programs available within their community as well as compare services in neighbouring communities and contact the ones that best suit their needs.

The LIHN currently have an operating website that outlines who they are and what they are doing at present. The addition of services provided in local communities within each LHIN will

make this site a “one stop shop” for health care and public service information, education on how funds are allocated and how the province is managing our health care system.

Utilizing current Public Health Units as the intermediate allows those without access to a computer a familiar and reputable place to turn to for local agencies and services in their community. Registration with the Health Units will provide them with an up to date directory of services for all their health determinant needs.

Such a complete and simple resource utilizing the internet accessible by PC, laptops and mobile devices will allow the community, health care providers and social service workers to have better knowledge and access to health care and related services and work as a multi disciplinary team. As a care provider It would allow me to search and refer clients based on a holistic assessment of their needs promoting achievement of the client’s optimal health.

The current LHIN website has a tab for Health care providers. In that tab printable pamphlets or flyers can be downloaded and posted in physician’s offices and in hospitals to raise awareness of the website and services.

With the heightened awareness of services in each community by advertisement and a complete, user friendly resource will increase community usage of the offered services. Over a three year period the programs and services would report quarterly the number or clients served, surveyed satisfaction of clients, cost of operation, projected funding needed and recommendations to their local Public Health Unit. This in turn would be submitted to the respective LHIN. With these submissions of data this would promote certainty that funds for public services are allocated to accurately reflect the community. It would also serve as a means to trend what services are most utilized and needed in each community.

In addition to funds and services accurately representing each community the trending of utilized services can also be a valuable indicator for the need for research into a specific sector should statistics drastically shift over a short period of time.

Heightened awareness, convenient and simple access to health services, trending and accurate community reflection of services needed in the community have the potential to positively affect the health of every Ontarian. The determinants of health affect everyone and a comprehensive, easily to navigate tool to facilitate access to services could improve community and individual health.