

Transforming Primary Health Care in Ontario: Spotlight on Community-Centredness

High performing primary health care organizations are community-centred. Their efforts recognize that factors outside the health system affect health outcomes and that community members need to be active participants improving them.¹ More specifically, community-centred organizations:

- deliver services and programs based on what evidence tells them are the most important factors affecting health and wellbeing in the communities they serve;
- engage members in planning, delivering and evaluating services;
- ensure their committees and organizational structures appropriately represent the community; and
- develop initiatives that respond to medical and social conditions harming community health and wellbeing.²

Research demonstrates a wide range of benefits

Research suggests a strong focus on community-centredness pays off.

- Early evidence from the 1940's demonstrated community-centred models could have a substantial positive effect on the health of communities.³
- Other researchers found that compared to "professional models" community-centred models were "most effective, providing the highest level of services and demonstrating the best possibility for controlling costs."⁴
- A study examining "citizen participation" in 17 Community Health Centres across Canada found that these organizations "foster environments in which community members and staff feel empowered to participate in decision making." Their approach supported people and communities to better understand their challenges, build shared values, and increase levels of trust. Overall the study concluded that "CHC decision making had led to improved programs and services and the range or programs and services met the needs of the community."⁵



Making it happen in Ontario

The members of the Alliance for Healthier Communities includes Ontario's Community Health Centres, Community Family Health Teams, Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics. Each centre serves very different types of communities, but each is committed to ensure services and programs are community centred. Read on to find out more.



¹ Erica Valdovinos et al, Community-Centred Health Homes: Bridging the gap between health services and community prevention. Prevention Institute. (February 2011)

² Canadian Association of Community Health Centres, Canadian Community Health Centres organizational survey. (2013)

³ Fitzhugh Mullan et al, Community-oriented Primary Care: New Relevance in a Changing World. (November 2002)

⁴ Paul LaMarche, Choices for Change: the Path for Restructuring Primary Healthcare Services in Canada. (LaMarch 2003)

⁵ John Church et al, Citizen Participation Project. (May 2006)

Community-centredness in action

Alliance members apply two key practices to achieve community-centredness in their services and programs.

Community Governance

Ontario's Community Health Centres, Community Family Health Teams, Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics and Aboriginal Health Access Centres are all governed by boards of directors made up of community members. A research literature review⁶ shows this practice is increasingly recognized as a key ingredient to:

- improve health outcomes by building social capital and empowering individuals and communities;
- improve transparency and accountability in service delivery;
- restore and strengthen trust in democratic processes;
- meet diverse community needs; and
- ensure better resource allocation and more appropriate health service utilization based on values, strengths, resources and community expectations.⁷

In 2010 a comparison of models study suggested community governance as one of the potential reasons why Ontario's Community Health Centres better orient their services and programs to community needs.⁸

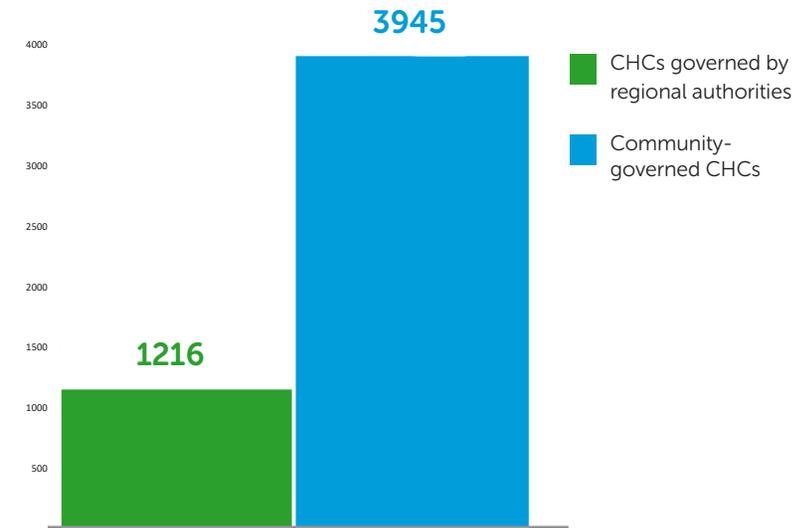
A 2013 survey conducted by the Canadian Association of Community Health Centres found community-governed members attracted increased participation in services and programs and were also more likely to mount initiatives designed to address community-based causes of illness.

Meaningful community engagement

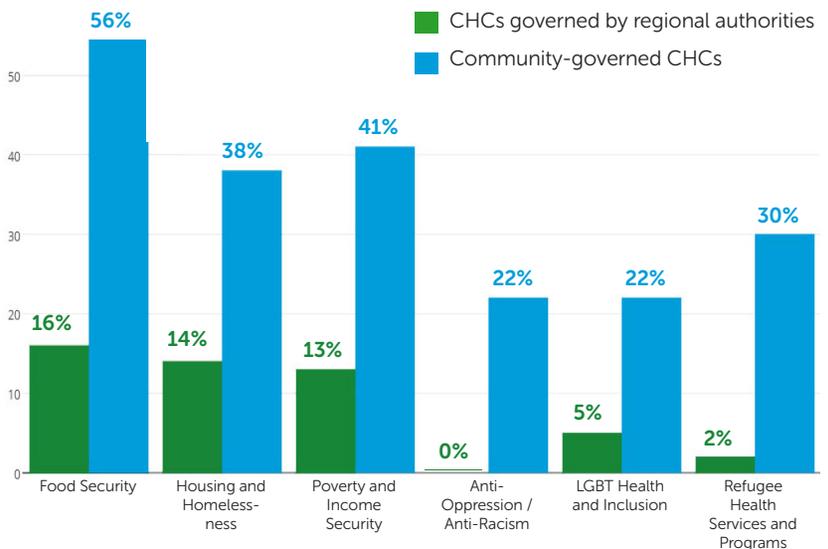
Actively involving community members in setting organizational goals and priorities is another way to create community-centredness. Alliance members:

- invite community members to join working groups and committees;
- gather input from the community members to guide strategic planning;
- employ many different of assessment tools to measure quality of life;
- involve those served in the development, delivery and evaluation of services;
- and create public forums where community members can speak out on priority issues that affect their health and wellbeing.

Average number of clients participating in health promotion, group support and community health programs per year at CHCs⁹



Percentage of community health programs and advocacy offered at CHCs¹⁰



⁶ Karen Patzer, A review of Trends and Benefits of Community Engagement and Local Community Governance in Health Care. (2006)

⁷ ibid

⁸ Laura Muldoon, Community Orientation in primary care practices. (2010)

⁹ Canadian Association of Community Health Centres, Canadian Community Health Centres organizational survey. (2013)

¹⁰ ibid