

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2013 May 16

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR NEWCOMERS WITH NO HEALTH COVERAGE

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 066-13 re “Community Resources for Newcomers with no Health Coverage” be received for information.

Key Points

- In July 2012, the federal government eliminated a wide range of health services and benefits for refugee claimants from the Interim Federal Health Program. These cuts elicited concerns regarding the health of those seeking refuge in Canada.
- Under the Health Unit’s leadership, a group of community partners, local physicians, and medical students worked collaboratively to advocate for additional services for individuals without OHIP, and to develop a tool to help newcomers access health-related services for free or at very low cost in London and Middlesex County.

Identifying the Need

Significant changes were made to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) in July 2012, which resulted in the reduction and/or elimination of a wide range of health services and benefits for refugee claimants. There were numerous concerns regarding the potential negative impacts of these cuts on the health of those seeking refuge in Canada. Family Health Services staff, with two concerned local physicians, formed a Newcomer Resource Working Group comprised of community service providers, physicians, and medical students. This group met several times in an effort to find a way to respond to unmet health care needs of refugees and refugee claimants within our community. The group concluded that providing current and accurate information on free and low cost health-related services in the community to primary health care providers and other community service providers in an easy-to-access format would support these providers in making appropriate and timely referrals, and would ultimately help mitigate some of the potential negative impacts of the IFHP funding changes.

Developing the Resource

Initially, the group identified what free or low cost health-related services were available within London and Middlesex County for people that have no OHIP card. It was decided that information included in the resource should be directly related to health care services affected by the IFHP cuts and should not include resources related to basic needs, as the existing “Help Yourself Through Hard Times” resource directory already includes this information. The group also determined that the resource would not be designed for direct distribution to clients, but would be distributed to staff and volunteers who provide support to newcomers and refugees for the purpose of facilitating awareness of and referral to available services. A Resource Map (attached as [Appendix A](#)), or listing, was produced. The listing provides information on services in the following categories: primary health care, medical, prenatal, developmental screening, vision, hearing, dental, speech, mental health/addiction, respite, children, settlement, interpretation, emergency

shelter, sexual assault, telephone help line, and food bank. It also includes information regarding where clients can access free/low cost medical supplies and medications. Based on feedback received from partners such as the London Network for an Inclusive Community and the Physician Champion Group members, the decision was made to develop an accompanying [Booklet](#) to provide additional details about resources highlighted on the Map.

Distribution of the Resource Map and accompanying Booklet to physicians and community agencies began in February, and feedback has been very positive. The Map and Booklet are available on the Health Unit website, under “For Professionals”, and other agencies are being encouraged to link to these resources.

Benefits of Working Group Formation and Resource Development

A number of benefits have been realized from the formation of this Newcomer Resource Working Group:

- The identification of existing resources and the sharing of experiences related to working with refugees has resulted in expanded knowledge and enhanced practice among the workgroup members.
- Due to advocacy efforts of this group, some agencies made changes to their referral acceptance policies (i.e., some agencies who previously would not accept clients without a health card have changed their policies to now accept these clients), which ultimately resulted in a greater number of services available in our community for individuals without an OHIP card.
- Working together on this initiative has resulted in increased collaboration and networking among the Health Unit, community agencies and medical students.
- As a result of increased knowledge and understanding among professionals making referrals, it is expected that clients will access available services and resources more easily and in a timely manner.

Conclusion/Next Steps

The Health Unit responded to concerns regarding Interim Federal Health Program cuts, in collaboration with community partners, local physicians, and medical students, by developing a resource that outlines services available for individuals with no OHIP card. This initiative has resulted in increased services for newcomers in the community, improved referral practices and strengthened collaborative relationships. Distribution of these resources to health and social service providers in London and Middlesex County will continue on an ongoing basis, with the resource revised annually. There has been significant interest in these resources locally and provincially with opportunities for presenting the resource to large groups and an expression of interest from Best Start (Ontario’s Maternal Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Centre) to develop a similar resource reflecting available provincial services. Copies of the Resource Map and the accompanying Booklet will be sent to all members of City and County Council.

This report was prepared by Ms. Heather Lokko, Manager, Reproductive Health Team, and Ms. Joanne Simpson and Ms. Muriel Abbott, Public Health Nurses.

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Medical Officer of Health

<p>This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Foundational Standard: Requirements #3 and #4 Strategic Area of Focus: Improved health outcomes in the area of reducing health inequities</p>
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