



Working together with our community

Information Memo

To: Health and Social Services Advisory Committee
Date: May 26, 2025
Division: Haldimand-Norfolk Health and Social Services
Department: Social Services
Subject: Ontario Works Community Drop-In Clinics Update - HSS-25-008

Recommendation(s):

That the Information Memo regarding the HSS-25-008 to be received as information.

Background

One-time funding for 2024 was secured for the Ontario Works program through the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS). This funding opportunity was presented to Council in report HSS-23-065 in November 2023. Two components of this funding were directly related to creating service delivery opportunities within the communities of Haldimand and Norfolk Counties. The funded components consisted of one temporary full-time position dedicated to the planning, implementation and monitoring of community drop-in clinics and an allotted amount for the ongoing costs associated with running these clinics; including supplies needed.

The community drop-in clinic initiative was designed to deliver services directly to individuals in need, reducing barriers to resources and increasing engagement with support programs. This initiative was aimed at enhancing community outreach and client service.

The success of the Community Drop In project has led to several positive outcomes, including a reduction in system suspensions, improved access to critical benefits, and more appropriate client referrals. By engaging directly with clients in their own environments, we not only enhanced service accessibility but also strengthened community ties, ultimately contributing to a more integrated and responsive support system for vulnerable populations.

Discussion:

The initiative to improve access to Ontario Works staff has yielded significant positive outcomes for both clients and the broader community.

The Community Drop-In initiative was a successful outreach and engagement event that connected a total of 794 residents with critical services and supports.

Over the course of the drop-in series, the following outcomes were achieved:

- **MyBenefits Registrations:** Individuals were assisted in creating or updating their MyBenefits accounts, improving digital access to case information and communications. As of December 1st, 2024, our office had 52.17% of social assistance recipients registered with MyBenefits.
- **Action Plan Support:** 326 participants received guidance or follow-up on their Ontario Works action plan goals, including employment readiness, education, and health pathways.
- **Housing & Homelessness Prevention Supports:** 189 attendees were connected with housing supports, including referrals to emergency shelters, rent/utility arrears support, or housing stability programs.
- **ODSP Application or Community Support Referrals:** 112 individuals were either supported in initiating an ODSP application, successfully connected to a Community Support Worker or referred to the ODSP information session

The project rollout surpassed expectations. Dedicated staffing and increased promotional opportunities for Community Drop-In clinics in 2024 increased public attendance and support provided by the social assistance team by 244%. By leveraging public community spaces such as churches, libraries, learning centers, and subsidized housing units, we effectively met clients in familiar, accessible locations, ensuring that our services were available where they are most needed.

This approach also facilitated the development of new partnerships with local community agencies, enabling us to secure free or low-cost spaces for service delivery.

The funding opportunity in 2024 allowed the ability to assess the need and success of the community drop-in clinics. The results have proven the need for ongoing service delivery in our community. To date, Ontario Works staff continue to be accessible to individuals within Haldimand and Norfolk counties in local and familiar spaces but at a reduced capacity. This reduction is not related to the services accessible to individuals but rather the number of locations available. In 2024, funding allowed us to have the ability to cover mileage and rental fees in outlying areas. Additionally, community drop-in clinics were equipped with essential care items individuals were able to access. 2025 community drop-in is only available in high demand areas (based on tracking from 2024) with limited essential items available. Services continue to be available to individuals in outlying areas but not through drop-in clinics.

Key achievements that demonstrate the effectiveness of the Community Drop-In Project are as follows:

Community Engagement and Education:

We hosted several workshops which are geared towards enhancing the clients' understanding of the Ontario Disability Support Program application process and the support that Ontario Works can provide. These sessions provided clients with an

opportunity to meet with a Community Support Worker face to face increasing referrals and successful applications to the Disability Adjudication Unit.

Strategic Partnerships:

We have fostered valuable partnerships with key community agencies, strengthening our support network for the betterment of individuals accessing social assistance benefits locally.

Increased Benefit Access:

A concerted effort in conducting drop-in file check-ups led to an increase in the accessibility of health and participation benefits, ensuring that clients received timely and accurate financial support to continue their life stabilization goals.

Effective Communication Outreach:

A targeted electronic communication campaign proved to be an effective method for reaching clients and community partners, keeping them informed on dates and locations of where case workers would be.

Increased Public Awareness and Access:

Through our targeted promotional efforts, including strategically placed signage, we were able to reach a diverse range of individuals, including those who may not have otherwise sought assistance. These efforts significantly enhanced accessibility to our services, ensuring that folks from various backgrounds were informed and encouraged to engage with the support available.

Comprehensive Client Support:

The project also made essential services, such as food, warm clothing, and personal hygiene items readily available. This holistic approach supported individuals' immediate needs while working toward long-term stability.

ID replacement:

Assisting individuals to obtain valid identification. This support was instrumental in helping clients open bank accounts, access essential services, and obtain other forms of government-issued identification, which are critical for securing employment, housing, and social benefits.

Assistance with Applications:

We provided clients with support in completing applications for various programs, including Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), Rent-

Geared-to-Income (RGI) housing, and the Housing Stability Bank, and a variety of other applications.

Expanded Referral Pathways:

Through collaboration with Employment Ontario and the Adult Learning Centres, we established clearer and more effective referral pathways, helping clients connect with additional resources to support their employment and educational goals.

Staff Development and Training:

In alignment with the best practices for client safety, eight staff members completed additional training in substance use poisoning and naloxone administration from our local health unit.

Financial Services Comments:

Norfolk County

The Approved 2024 Operating Budget included \$116,600 to support the Community Drop-In Clinics. The program was fully spent in the year, with funding provided by MCCSS (\$58,300), Norfolk County (\$33,814) and Haldimand County (\$24,486) based on the cost share reconciliation.

The successful program continued into 2025, at a reduced capacity as mentioned in the report. The Approved 2025 Operating Budget includes \$14,000 for operating the drop-in clinics, funded by Norfolk (\$8,300) and Haldimand (\$5,700) counties.

Haldimand County

Haldimand Finance staff have reviewed this report and agree with the information provided by Norfolk Financial Services.

Attachment(s):

N/A

Conclusion:

This report serves as a follow-up to the secured funding from MCCSS to Norfolk County CMSM.

Through these initiatives, we have not only enhanced the accessibility of services but have also made significant strides in building stronger community connections and improving client outcomes. This outcome is directly linked to our service delivery of the Ontario Works program.

The Community Day project has demonstrated the power of collaboration, proactive outreach, and targeted interventions in creating a more supportive and inclusive environment for those we serve.

Approval:

Approved By:

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