

Promising Practices for Strengthening Primary Care

Better Health Innovation



The challenge

About 20 percent of people in Renfrew County, Ontario, do not have timely access to primary care or their own family doctor or nurse practitioner due to a shortage of healthcare providers. Further, many community members have complex care needs and face socioeconomic challenges.

The promising practice

ConnectWell Community Health Centre's Better Health Innovation (BHI) provides clients with permanent access to team-based primary care, while improving collaboration among the interdisciplinary team. The BHI steps include:

- Coordinated intake: admin gathers essential client information and builds the chart.
- Wellness review and timely referral: nurse reviews health and engages the interdisciplinary team (e.g., pharmacist, social worker) immediately as needed.
- Optimized access: proactive team-based care minimizes the need for immediate primary care appointments, reducing bottlenecks and reserves provider visits for essential needs.

Example impacts

Improved patient experience and access to team-based care:

- 36 new clients have permanent access to a primary care team.
- 1,191 clients were transferred to other providers when their doctor or nurse practitioner resigned/retired and were not de-rostered.
- Clients have shared that they feel welcomed and supported.

Improved team and provider functioning and experience:

- Team members maximize their scope of practice, ensuring the most appropriate team member addresses client needs.
- Administrative staff have enhanced autonomy and authority.
- Streamlined referral and documentation processes support efficient client intake.
- Improved team communication and collaboration, which promotes provider wellness and reduces burnout.

Potential future impacts:

- Improved permanent access to team-based primary care.
- Reduced avoidable emergency department visits.
- A community-wide system of health promotion, disease prevention and addressing determinants of health.

"Client and wife are very appreciative to be connecting with the clinic. Relief expressed by wife repeatedly. Client expressed amazement at the wrap around services that we offer."

- BHI provider



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Keys to success

- **Use of a quality improvement approach** allows for adaptation and ensures the practice evolves to meet changing needs.
- **Competitive compensation and prioritizing staff wellness** are essential to attract and retain qualified professionals, ensuring a healthy team capable of delivering high-quality care.
- **Strong partnerships with local service providers** to help shape culturally safe and high-quality services.

Lessons learned

- Manage staff expectations, remain adaptable, and creatively partner with community organizations to maximize collective resources.
- Make improvement efforts incrementally to prevent overburdening staff and encourage open communication.
- Support the team with regular wellness check-ins.
- Community is everything! Building trust is vital for sustainable, effective community partnerships.

How can I learn more?

Contact the organization.

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"I feel welcomed and confident that the care that I fall under will have the relevant information for the betterment of my welfare."
- BHI patient

Why was this summary created?

ConnectWell Community Health – Renfrew County Sites participated in Healthcare Excellence Canada's (HEC) Strengthening Primary Care (SPC) program. SPC brought together 20 primary care organizations from across Canada to advance practices to improve access to safe, including culturally safe, team-based primary care.

This promising practice summary was co-produced with CHC to help others learn about their work and generate discussion about how similar approaches could be adapted and applied elsewhere.