



SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ONTARIO)

INFORMATION BULLETIN

ONTARIO HEALTH TEAMS

December 7, 2023

This Bulletin is intended to address the significant interest of Seniors for Social Action Ontario's membership in Ontario Health Teams – what they are intended to do, how they relate to home care (HCCSS), and how members can find more information about them.

Background and Purpose of Ontario Health Teams (OHTs)

In 2019 Health Minister Christine Elliott introduced Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) with the intention of breaking down the silos in health care and building a more connected, coordinated, and sustainable system to reduce wait times and create better health outcomes for patients. The idea was to bring health care providers together locally to address the problems and gaps in health care provision that were contributing to hallway health care and failing patients. The first OHTs were to help make it easier for patients to transition from one health care provider to another, for example, between hospitals and home care, by having one shared record and care plan.

24/7 system navigation and care coordination services are to be phased in over time with each of the current 57 OHTs communicating with patients and their families about the improvements they can expect locally.

If you have questions for your local Ontario Health team, the list of OHTs can be found here by region if you scroll to the bottom of the page:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-health-teams> By clicking on your OHT it will take you to its web page where there should be contact information.

Patients can contact their usual health care providers as they always have (Ontario Government, 2019).

Mission, Governance, and Services of Ontario Health

Vision, Mission and Values

Ontario Health is now the lead agency overseeing Ontario Health Teams across the province. Health Quality Ontario is part of Ontario Health, the intent being to tie evidence and data to the work of Ontario Health and OHTs across the province. In addition to the incorporation of Health Quality Ontario, Ontario Health also combines all of these organizations which formerly functioned independently: ***Cancer Care Ontario; CorHealth Ontario (merger of the Cardiac Care Network and the Ontario Stroke Network); eHealth Ontario (digital patient health information system); Health Force Ontario (recruitment of health care providers); Health Shared Services (Health 811 providing health advice); Ontario Telemedicine (virtual care); Trillium Gift of Life Network (organ and tissue donations).***

Ontario Health’s “vision is to be a leader in health and wellness for all. Its mission is to connect the health system to drive improved and equitable health outcomes, experiences, and value. Its values are integrity, inspiration, tenacity, humility, and care” based on an equity, inclusion and anti-racism framework.

Governance

As of August, 2023, Ontario Health was governed by a 10 person Board of Directors appointed by the Minister of Health (2023b). Board membership can go up to 15. The Board is accountable to the Minister of Health. The Health Ministry establishes policy and Ontario Health carries out that policy.

Its CEO is Matthew Anderson, and there is a 13 person senior leadership team (Ontario Health, 2023c).

There are three regional officers overseeing the six health regions (formerly the LHIN regions):

Ontario Health West and Central: Susan deRyk (27 OHTs)

Ontario Health East and Toronto: Anna Greenberg (20 OHTs)

Ontario Health North East and North West: Brian Kytor (10 OHTs)

Regional Teams are each focused on performance, accountability and allocation of resources; clinical programs; strategy, planning, design, and implementation of programs and policies; capacity, access, and flow; health equity as related to various populations; and regional communication.

Objects and Services

Ontario Health measures and reports on how the health care system is performing; oversees the quality and delivery of clinical services (cancer care, cardiac, palliative, mental health and addictions and renal care); manages funding and accountability for parts of the health care system; creates digital and virtual services to empower patients and providers with complete health information; delivers organ and tissue donation and transplantation services; sets quality standards and evidence-based guidelines in care delivery; and helps oversee Ontario's pandemic response.

Patient engagement is intended to be a cornerstone of Ontario Health's work (Ontario Health, 2023).

Ontario Health's objects are outlined in the Connecting Care Act 2019 as: implementing the Ministry of Health's system strategies; managing health service needs consistent with these strategies to ensure quality and sustainability; operate, manage, and co-ordinate Ontario's health system; measure performance and management, evaluate, monitor and report to the Ministry; develop clinical and quality standards for patient care and safety and improve quality; disseminate knowledge; engage and relate to patients; implement digital health, information technology, and data management services; support health care practitioner recruitment and retention; plan, co-

ordinate, and support Ontario’s tissue donation and transplantation services; support the patient ombudsman’s functions; provide supply chain management services to health service providers and related organizations; provide advice, recommendations and information to the Minister and others in the health care system related to issues specified by the Minister; promote health service integration to enable coordinated, and effective service delivery; respect community diversity including requirements of the French Language Services Act; and any other prescribed objects (Ontario Government, 2019b).

Funding

Each designated OHT can receive an integrated funding envelope, and enter into an accountability agreement with Ontario Health. This process will be governed by a future regulation under the Connecting Care Act which will outline requirements an OHT would need to meet to receive a funding envelope. The process of “designation” of OHTs to receive funding envelopes will begin in December, 2024.

OHTs will be non-profit corporations, aligned with a Primary Care Network (family physicians and nurse practitioners). They will select an operational support provider.

Questions Concerning Accountability

During a recent Zoom Session on the Function of Ontario Health Teams and Home Care Modernization, questions were raised about how home care contractors might be held accountable. It appears that part of the process of creating accountability will be the use of incentives.

Since 2010 the Ontario Government has had a “Pay for Results” program in operation (Ontario Government, 2010). This may mean that there will also be financial incentives for other health services to meet their obligations.

Ontario Health's Priorities

The current priorities are to put the person at the centre of health care implementation; to reduce inequities; to enhance clinical care and services, to apply evidence to practice; to strengthen leadership capacity within the organization.

Implications for Home Care

Bill 135 An Act to amend the Connecting Care Act, 2019 “with respect to home and community care services and health governance and to make related amendments to other acts” sets out the government’s approach to modernizing Home Care. The primary purpose of the Bill is to establish the Service Organization - a corporation without share capital operating under the name Ontario Health atHome through the amalgamation of existing Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs). The Service Organization is a subsidiary of the Agency, a Crown agent, and a health service provider.

The Act sets out the objects of the Service Organization which are to provide home and community care services including care co-ordination, and to provide operational support to health service providers and Ontario Health Teams.

It removes “cause of action” and legal proceedings against the Crown, the Agency, the Service Organization, and specific related persons for certain acts.

It gives the Agency the power to issue directives to the Service Organization which is required to comply with those directives, including disclosing specific information related to service contracts. Personal health information can be disclosed to the Minister for the purpose of monitoring, assessing, and evaluating home and community care services. Personal health information disclosure is back dated to May 1, 2022.

The Act also sets out new regulation-making powers governing certain aspects of the Service Organization and transitional matters related to the amalgamation.

Seniors for Social Action Ontario made a submission to a Committee of the Ontario Legislature examining this Act. It can be found here:

https://www.seniorsactionontario.com/_files/ugd/50033d_f2c7f4cb2ed74780870cf163fa531fc2.pdf

The government's full plan for the reorganization of the health care system is laid out in the document Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care found here: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/your-health-plan-connected-and-convenient-care>

Questions about how Ontario Health Teams will work with patients, families, caregivers and the public can be answered by using this e-mail address: patientengagement@ontariohealth.ca.

General questions about Ontario Health Teams can be answered by using this e-mail address: ontariohealthteams@ontario.ca

Concerns about current provision of home and community care services can be raised with the Patient Ombudsman via e-mail, phone, or their complaint form – all can be found here: <https://patientombudsman.ca/Contact>

Urgent complaints about Home Care provision can also be made using the Long Term Care Action Line – 1-800-434-0144

COMMENTARY

This represents essentially a bureaucratic reorganization of how health care is delivered in Ontario. Many Seniors for Social Action Ontario members will recall the Community Care Access Centres, then the Local Health Integration Networks, then the Home and Community Care Support Services as iterations of various Ontario governments' efforts to "reform" home and

health care delivery. It remains to be seen whether or not this latest reorganization will be more effective than the other three.

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