
MEMORANDUM

PHD-C 05-2022

Subject: Divestment of Niagara Region Mental Health's Telemedicine Service and Reallocation of Resources

Date: July 12, 2022

To: Public Health & Social Services Committee

From: Lisa Panetta, Associate Director Mental Health

Niagara Region Mental Health (NRMH) services are 100% funded by Ontario Health (OH). We are pleased that OH approved a collaborative service change proposal submitted by NRMH and Niagara Health (NH) to improve and streamline mental health services in Niagara.

These changes include an enhancement to NRMH's Early Psychosis Intervention (EPI) service as well as the transfer of NRMH's Telemedicine (TM) service to NH's Centralized Access to Psychiatry service (CAPS). There is no financial impact to Niagara Region from these changes due to the 100% funding model in place.

NRMH offers the only specialized EPI service in the Niagara Region. EPI has experienced steady growth in demand and is struggling to maintain adherence to the provincial EPI standards of service, especially with respect to wait times. It is critical to be able to respond promptly to young people experiencing their first episode of psychosis in order to improve the overall trajectory of their illness. Prompt treatment results in a decreased risk of hospitalization and fewer subsequent episodes of psychosis, and helps clients to move forward with education, employment and other opportunities. The newly approved reallocation of funds will help reduce wait times for EPI services.

NRMH's TM service provides comprehensive assessment to clients in the community followed by a virtual consultation with a psychiatrist via the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN). This model of service relies on having sufficient access to psychiatry plus funding to compensate psychiatrists for their non-OHIP-billable time. Due to these limiting factors, the NRMH's TM service is only able to serve a limited number of clients, and they experience lengthy wait times for service.

NH operates a similar service to Telemedicine called Centralized Access to Psychiatry service (CAPS) which employs several psychiatrists and nurse practitioners, enabling CAPS to see over ten times the number of individuals served by NRMH. As with most of the mental health system, CAPS sees a very high volume of referrals and clients experience lengthy wait times for service. After extensive discussion and exploration of options, it was agreed that CAPS is better-positioned to provide this type of service and the community would benefit from a single point of intake for the service with additional capacity to meet the growing demand.

Specifically, the approved changes are effective July 15, 2022 and include:

- a reallocation of TM resources to NRMH EPI (\$220,878 annualized funding or approximately 44 percent of the TM budget), which will transfer two nurses to the EPI team (2.0 FTEs), enabling the service to provide intensive service to an additional 50 clients each year (approximately a 15 percent increase in clients served)
- a divestment of TM resources to NH CAPS (\$285,462 annualized funding or approximately 56 percent of the TM budget), which will reduce NRMH by 2.0 FTEs, and transfer one nurse and one nurse practitioner to the CAPS team, enabling CAPS to see an additional 1,800 clients each year. That represents a 4-fold increase above the client load TM was able to serve, meaning there will be a significant net increase of service to the Niagara community.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Lisa Panetta, RP, M.Sc.
Associate Director, Mental Health
Public Health & Emergency Services