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UPDATE ON THE ONTARIO WORKS MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE MODEL

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, May 24, 2007, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress of the Ontario Works Mental Health Resource Model.

3. BACKGROUND

In fall 2004, the Community Services and Housing Department introduced an Ontario Works Mental Health Resource Model to address a perceived increase in the number of participants presenting with mental health issues and concerns. In collaboration with several local mental health agencies, the model was implemented to assist staff to better support clients through improved knowledge of community resources, enhanced case management approaches and a greater understanding of mental health disorders.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 The Model

There are three components to the model: Mental Health Liaison, Mental Health Staff Training, and a Mental Health Resource Team.

4.1.1 Mental Health Liaison

Beginning in 2004, staff engaged the support of key York Region community mental health service providers including the Canadian Mental Health Association, Crosslinks Supportive Housing, York Support Services Network and the Lance Krasman Centre in designing various aspects of the model. The collaboration between mental health agencies and Ontario Works staff has resulted in many benefits including:

- The creation of a team of mental health experts using a case conferencing approach to support staff in assisting individuals with mental health concerns.
- The delivery of agency-led staff training involving presenters having first-hand experience with mental health issues.
- The development of a Mental Health resource guide to assist staff when referring participants to community programs.
- The promotion of strong, collaborative relationships with community agencies resulting in improved networking between Ontario Works and agency staff.
- The establishment of annual year-end meetings with mental health providers to discuss future training needs and refinements to the model.

4.1.2 Mental Health Training

In 2005-2006, mental health training was provided at no cost to the Region as part of each agency's public education mandate. In total, 20 sessions were delivered and 115 staff received training on concurrent disorders, community resources, case management strategies and techniques to sensitively approach individuals with suspected mental health concerns.

As part of the training, several mental health consumers spoke about their experiences dealing with their own mental health concerns. Ontario Works staff reported that these personal testimonials were the highlight of the training as they served to remind staff of the daily challenges facing many Ontario Works clients. These testimonials also served to increase staff comfort level when supporting participants with mental health issues.

As part of the model, annual mental health training is provided as a means of meeting participant needs. Annual training provides benefits to staff and participants by:

- Enhancing staff knowledge and sensitivity to mental health issues and their potential impact on an individual's well-being.
- Introducing new case management strategies to more effectively serve individuals with mental health concerns, leaving more time to support their employment needs and the employment needs of other individuals.
- Increasing awareness of mental health community resources which in turn produces more appropriate referrals for participants.

Additional subject-specific training sessions will be introduced each year. Currently, staff are working with the community to explore possible training on mental health issues facing recent immigrants to Canada. This training would be provided in the coming year.

4.1.3 Mental Health Resource Team

Utilizing the expertise of the partnering agencies, the Mental Health Resource Team meets on a regular basis to provide Ontario Works staff with practical case management and referral strategies to support participants with mental health concerns.

The Team has held a total of 25 meetings since its introduction in 2004 and has benefited from strong agency representation at each meeting. Since its inception, the Team has reviewed a total of 90 cases impacting over 159 beneficiaries of Ontario Works. Case presentations have included situations involving schizophrenia, depression, anger management and abuse.

The benefits of the Mental Health Resource Team to staff and participants include:

- Enhanced understanding of mental health disorders, supporting all Community Services and Housing staff to make more appropriate referrals to community resources
- Increased knowledge of strategies to approach individuals with suspected mental health concerns, resulting in greater levels of staff confidence in dealing with multi-barriered clients.
- Improved case management skills serving multi-barriered participants, allowing more time to address the needs of other participants.
- Increased familiarity with agency supports and programs, resulting in more effective referrals to a range of community supports including counselling, court support programs and supportive housing options.
- Improved strategies to engage participants to apply to long-term and more appropriate income support programs such as the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Since the development of the resource team, a total of 45 cases have been referred to ODSP, 21 of which are now receiving ODSP.

In addition, as part of the model, nine participants were recently funded to complete voluntary, specialized employability assessments. To illustrate the effectiveness of the approach, in one case, an individual with suspected mental health concerns and no link to the health-care system agreed to participate in the employability assessment, a major step for this participant who had been in receipt of Ontario Works for 20 years. The participant has noted how the approach is assisting them and, moving forward, it is hoped that this individual will now have the opportunity to be connected with necessary community supports and eventually be eligible for ODSP where their income support needs will be better served.

4.2 Relationship to AODA

The introduction of the Mental Health Resource Model demonstrates the Department's commitment to enhance access to community programs and services to persons with disabilities including persons with mental health disabilities that are specific to their individual needs. This initiative also assists the Region in meeting its obligations under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

York Region's Ontario Works Mental Health Resource Model meets the goals of Vision 2026 by responding to the Region's diversity with an innovative service delivery option

to meet the needs of vulnerable residents, while building relationships with public-sector partners. It proactively addresses the needs of our clients by meeting service needs at the right time and place with a view to cost efficiency.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Building on existing community capacity, the Mental Health Resource Model has operated at no additional cost to the Region. The initial cost of implementation (\$4000) was managed through the Department's Community Development and Investment Fund (CDIF) in 2004. Over the past two and a half years, the model has used existing staff, community resources and budgets to support clients. All training sessions have been provided at no cost to the Region through the public education mandate of the mental health agencies.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities benefit through effective strategies that assist vulnerable residents on Ontario Works to access effective community services and appropriate income support programs, thereby enhancing their quality of life and independence.

7. CONCLUSION

Many residents who receive Ontario Works assistance experience complex barriers to employment associated with mental health issues, resulting in the need for more intensive and appropriate supports to assist them in meeting their goals and aspirations.

To proactively address these needs, the Employment and Financial Support Branch introduced a Mental Health Resource Model. This initiative has resulted in the development of a Mental Health Resource Team that draws on existing community capacity and expertise.

Over the past two years, staff have developed improved knowledge and awareness of mental health disorders, and a greater level of confidence and sensitivity in working with participants with mental health issues. The model has supported staff to make improved referrals to community mental health programs and services, resulting in a positive impact on the quality of life for many individuals.

For more information on this report contact Ted Burley, Acting Director of Employment and Financial Support Branch, Community Services and Housing Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.