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ONTARIO WORKS PROGRAM MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE MODEL

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, September 30, 2004, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information by Committee and Council.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Committee and Council with information pertaining to a new Mental Health Resource Model initiative being introduced in the Social Assistance Division. The model provides supports for staff to better serve Ontario Works participants with diagnosed and suspected mental health issues in order to enable them to access effective services and increase their independence and self sufficiency.

3. BACKGROUND

It is estimated by Health Canada in their publication, "A Report on Mental Illness In Canada", that 20% of Canadians will experience a mental illness during their lifetime and the remaining 80% of the population will be affected by a mental illness impacting family members, friends or colleagues. Mental illness affects people of all ages, education, income levels, and cultures. Diagnosed and undiagnosed mental illness can be costly to the individual, the family, the health care system, the social service system, and the community. However, research also conducted by Health Canada, has shown that mental health issues can be treated effectively when the appropriate supports and resources are provided.

Persons with mental health issues may face periods of time when they are unable to work and are in need of financial supports. In Ontario Works, there is a growing portion of the caseload who experience increasingly complex and/or multi-faceted barriers to employment related to mental health issues. This has resulted in an increasing number of persons on the Ontario Works caseload requiring more extensive assistance to support them in moving toward employment and self-sufficiency.

As part of the Social Assistance Division's commitment to effective return-to-work initiatives, the mental health resource model for service delivery has been developed to better serve clients with diagnosed and suspected mental health issues. In collaboration with staff of both the Family and Children's Services and Housing and Residential Services Divisions, Social Assistance staff will refer Ontario Works participants to

services that enable them to more effectively engage in employment activities or to access more appropriate programs such as the provincial Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

3.1 Mental Health Resource Model Components

The York Region Mental Health Resource Model framework has three components:

3.1.1 Mental Health Resource Team

A team will be established to offer a case resolution approach to an Ontario Works participant's mental health issues, including referral to appropriate internal programs and external mental health and community services. The Mental Health Resource Team will include representatives from across the Community Services and Housing Department as well as volunteer representation from community mental health agencies and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Three mental health service providers have expressed their support for this resource team approach and will be sending staff representatives offering clinical and case management expertise.

3.1.2 Community Mental Health Providers Liaison

As part of the model, the Division will build upon existing community connections and establish strong, collaborative working relationships with external mental health service providers. This approach will support effective community level co-ordination of services for Ontario Works participants with mental health issues. Staff recently met with a number of community based mental health agencies and received strong support for the new model.

3.1.3 Training

Ontario Works staff are not mental health specialists and are limited in their ability to assist participants to overcome barriers to mental health. However, they may be called upon to deal with crisis issues and provide other mental health support and referral. A key component of this model is to provide all Social Assistance staff with training on mental health issues to build awareness, sensitivity and skills. All staff will receive training in 2004.

Training will specifically address:

- Identification of diagnosed and suspected mental health issues
- Sensitivity as it pertains to mental health issues
- Effective interview and case management techniques
- Enhanced coordination with internal resources such as child care and housing
- Community resources and strategies for moving participants to appropriate services

3.2 Service Delivery Goals

The goal of the Mental Health Resource Model is to build the Division's capacity to effectively address mental health issues that may be affecting individual Ontario Works participants and support these individuals. The model will support staff to better recognize participants with suspected and diagnosed mental health issues, and to assist

these participants to access appropriate community programs and services and the full range of employment opportunities under Ontario Works.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Impact of Mental Health Barriers on Service Delivery

Social Assistance staff in York Region have indicated that they are working with an increasing number of participants who have diagnosed or suspected mental health barriers. This results in a greater portion of the caseload requiring more intensive supports to move them toward self-sufficiency.

In conducting research regarding a York Region model, Ontario Works staff consulted with counterparts in Halton Region, who have recently piloted their own mental health model. Halton's research estimated that approximately 35% of Ontario Works participants are experiencing mental health issues which greatly affect their ability to participate in employment assistance programs. This in turn required staff to spend up to 50% of their time on crisis intervention related to mental health issues with participants.

There is a general recognition that the "shortest route to employment" focus of the Ontario Works program does not adequately meet the needs of participants with mental health issues and does not recognize the high demands on staff time and resources to effectively support these clients.

Without a responsive delivery model, unmanaged mental health needs impact significantly on service and the person's ability to participate in employment assistance and other important support programs. This in turn compromises the individual's chances of achieving their goals including their opportunities for increased self reliance. York Region has, therefore, developed in conjunction with community agencies, a service delivery approach to more effectively address the complex mental health issues facing its Ontario Works clients.

4.2 Outcomes of the Mental Health Model

Through the full implementation of the model, it is expected that participants will achieve improved access to appropriate mental health services, increased participation in community mental health programs, and enhanced access to employment options and opportunities.

A full one-year post implementation evaluation of the new service delivery model will be completed in fall 2005. The outcome measures of the evaluation will track:

- rate of referrals to community mental health programs
- rate of referrals to the provincial Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP),
- number of participants with mental health barriers/issues actively participating in employment-related activities and achieving employment related outcomes
- number of staff trained on mental health issues
- estimates of cost avoidance based on activity noted above

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

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

Through effective community collaboration the initial cost to implement this program is \$4,000.00. This amount is funded through the Community Services and Housing Department's Community Development and Investment Fund (CDIF) as an approved project for 2004. No additional costs are anticipated for 2005. Supports to participants engaged in services such as child care and travel, will be funded through existing OW and Child Care Program budgets. The model will be tracked closely as it pertains to community referral and support outcomes (including ODSP) and employment related outcomes with a view to cost avoidance. The first level evaluation, as noted in Section 4.2 of this report, will be conducted in fall 2005 after one full year of implementation.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

There is no direct impact on local municipalities, however all municipalities benefit through effective strategies to assist vulnerable residents to access effective community services and employment opportunities.

7. CONCLUSION

Research and the experience of caseworkers indicate there is a growing portion of the Ontario Works caseload that experience complex barriers to employment associated with mental health issues. This has resulted in the need for more extensive and effective assistance to support these participants in moving toward self sufficiency.

In order to proactively address these issues and promote effective outcomes, the Social Assistance Division has introduced a new Mental Health Resource Model initiative. This initiative, premised on effective internal and external community collaboration, promotes a case resolution, community liaison, and staff knowledge approach.

Through effective planning and collaboration, the costs to introduce this model are low, with funding accessed through the Community Services and Housing Department's Community Development Investment Fund. The goals, however, are high in that the objective of the Mental Health Resource Model is to build the capacity to enable participants to access appropriate programs and services and the full range of

employment opportunities they may otherwise not have been able to effectively access under Ontario Works.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.