

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
MUNICIPALITÉ RÉGIONALE D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf.
Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 9 September 1998

TO/DEST. Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Medical Officer of Health

SUBJECT/OBJET **CSC INQUIRY NO. 12/(98): PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH
THE HEALTH CARD AMONG THE HOMELESS
POPULATION**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That Community Services Committee receive this report for information.

PURPOSE

The issue of the homeless attaining and retaining Health Cards was raised by Councillor Holmes at the 21 May 98 meeting of the Community Services Committee.

BACKGROUND

Provincial Situation

The homeless in this province experience barriers to accessing health care because of their difficulty in obtaining and retaining health cards. The Province now requires presentation of a valid health card to access any OHIP-insured service. Some shelters and drop in centres will keep health cards or photocopies of health cards if requested to do so by individuals but this is not mandatory. The result is a haphazard system of assistance in retaining cards.

OHIP will assign a health card for a period of 6 months as a temporary measure to those without identification when local shelters and drop in centres complete a form letter stating that their client has been a resident of Ontario for 3 months. Health cards can only be given permanently when the client produces the necessary identification (ID).

The Street Health Coalition

The Street Health Coalition in Ottawa-Carleton supports the homeless using Health Cards to access the health care system as many are able to maintain long periods of independence within mainstream society

The Coalition, of which the Health Department is a member, addressed the issue of Health Card access for this population with OHIP in 1995. That fall, OHIP assisted 200 people in obtaining Health Cards on site at Centre 454. OHIP has continued to be very supportive and has established a direct contact for Public Health Nurses, Outreach Workers, and staff of Shelters, Drop-Ins, and Community Health Centres (CHCs) providing assistance to clients seeking Health Cards.

This collaboration led to the establishment of the following local process to assist the homeless:

1. OHIP provides temporary coverage and then a permanent card when a birth certificate/immigration status as proof of citizenship, shelter/drop-in form letter as proof of Ontario residency, plus any other ID with a signature are provided;
2. The Region's Social Services Department assists by covering the cost of Birth Certificates, and CHCs see clients without Health Cards.

Proposal to Enhance Primary Health Care Services for the Homeless in Ottawa-Carleton

Funding is expected for a proposal submitted to the Community Health Branch, Ministry of Health by Centretown, Sandy Hill, Somerset West and Pinecrest-Queensway CHCs to address issues related to homelessness and its impact on health. Some of this new funding will build on the working relationship established with OHIP in 1995. Planned initiatives include: an expanded primary health care service supported by a 24 hour OHIP access line for health care providers; an ID/health card blitz; a centralized ID program that can assist in obtaining and retaining health cards; and, resources to assist the homeless who do not have a health card in accessing mainstream health care services. The Region's Social Services Department will continue to provide the funding needed for Birth Certificates.

CONCLUSION

Multiple partners including the Region's Health and Social Services Departments have worked together for several years to improve access to Health Cards and the health care system for the homeless. Area OHIP staff have also been of great assistance. New funding to local CHCs, if approved, will greatly enhance these efforts.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The impact of increased requests for Special Assistance to obtain Birth Certificates has been reviewed with the Region's Social Services Department. This can be managed within existing funding.

CONSULTATION

This is an information report to Committee therefore no public consultation is considered necessary at this time.

*Approved by
Robert Cushman*