

ESTABLISHING A MOBILE RAPID ACCESS ADDICTIONS MEDICINE CLINIC

PROVIDING IMMEDIATE ACCESS TO PHARMACOTHERAPY AND PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTIONS

Addiction Services for York Region

2020 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission

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ABOUT ASYR

When Addiction Services for York Region (ASYR) was first established in 1983, its purpose was to provide supportive services to people affected by addictions. This work continues today, and we are proud to be providing a suite of comprehensive programs and services to individuals, their families and communities across a wide geography. Currently, our organization is the largest provider of addiction services in York Region, South Simcoe and North Toronto.

Through the array of programs and services that we provide, our extensive partnerships and geographic reach, ASYR is able to serve thousands of clients each year providing them with access to the services and quality supports they need, when they need them.

In 2016, ASYR was actively involved in the seven-site pilot project that introduced the Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (RAAM) model to the province of Ontario through funding from the Council of Academic Hospitals of Ontario and Health Quality Ontario. With new funding from the Central LHIN that was started in 2017, ASYR has now expanded its RAAM services and is operating RAAM clinics in all six (6) Central LHIN hospitals (Humber River Hospital, Mackenzie Richmond Hill Hospital, Markham Stouffville Hospital, North York General Hospital, Southlake Regional Health Centre, Stevenson Memorial Hospital). With its expertise in programs and services for people affected by addictions, ASYR offers a more comprehensive wrap-around care for individuals who attend one of its RAAM clinics.

THE MOBILE RAAM (M-RAAM) MODEL

In 2018, with agreement from the Central LHIN, ASYR initiated a pilot to establish a Mobile RAAM service that would serve harder-to-reach individuals. It was a very successful pilot, however, ASYR was not able to continue the program due to resource constraints. Other community agencies and provincial funders expressed interest in the pilot and ASYR is aware that some communities have, or are considering, establishing a Mobile RAAM service.

ASYR is now proposing to re-establish its Mobile Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (M-RAAM) clinic that would serve harder-to-reach populations and would complement the work of the agency. The M-RAAM is a unique and innovative model in Ontario that could be scaled up. The M-RAAM clinic builds on the traditional Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (RAAM) clinic model, which provides immediate access to pharmacotherapy and psychosocial interventions in a low-barrier environment. The M-RAAM is a travelling RAAM clinic with additional wrap-around support and is focused on providing outreach and access to addictions care specifically for vulnerable populations.

The M-RAAM will be staffed with an addictions medicine specialist who will provide brief counselling and prescribe appropriate medication, nursing services, addictions counsellors, case managers and peer support specialists. This team will be able to provide brief counselling, make appropriate links to community services, and provide follow-up care, as required and/or appropriate. This expanded and mobile model of care will provide the essential wrap-around services needed to adequately support vulnerable Ontarians.

The proposed model is evidence-informed, involves a fully integrated and connected system, and provides immediate access to appropriate care for those most vulnerable.

WHY THE M-RAAM MODEL?

The M-RAAM clinic is aimed at filling the gap in the addiction treatment system by providing immediate and innovative access to evidence-based addiction care for those who are most vulnerable. Access to comprehensive, evidence-based assessment and treatment has been a challenge, especially given current waitlists for service. Literature and anecdotal evidence suggest that services should be more readily available for those who seek treatment for problematic substance use; however, only a small percentage of individuals are able to access these services.

Exploring innovative approaches to providing services and treatment will help improve the health of individuals and aim to provide connections with essential health and social services, including treatment for those who are ready for it. The M-RAAM project is designed to reduce the harms of opioid use as well as the use of other substances. The innovative approach is to mobilize these comprehensive services to increase immediate access to individuals where and when they need them.

With that said, it is also imperative that we address the needs of at-risk populations and develop an effective strategy to respond to specific needs pertaining to social and economic factors. We know that people with substance use disorder are at higher risk of experiencing additional psycho-social challenges including, but not limited to, the social determinants of health (poverty, homelessness, etc).

In addition, supporting the Indigenous population who may be at greater risk of experiencing mental health and substance related issues than the general population is critical with respect to the commitment to advance reconciliation, and address the disparities that exist particularly in relation to problematic substance use between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous

Canadians. Based on recent conversations with the Chippewas of Georgina Island, ASYR is discussing the opportunity to once again collaborate to provide culturally appropriate addiction programs and services on the Island.

One of the key activities that will contribute to achieving the above objectives is to strengthen our presence within marginalized, vulnerable, and rural communities, and to strengthen collaboration amongst community agencies in these areas. Providing low-barrier access to marginalized populations is a key step in protecting and supporting individuals most at-risk.

CONCLUSION

With expertise in the model, our proposal to re-establish the M-RAAM clinic presents a great opportunity to innovate and provide access to services for those most at-risk. ASYR has the demonstrated leadership ability to successfully implement this proposed project at a large scale which can serve as a potential model to provide much needed access to pharmacotherapy and psycho-social services to Ontario's most vulnerable and marginalized populations.

The provincial government is to be commended for the increase in investments in addictions and mental health in the past. It will be important to continue to these investments and, in fact, to increase them. Ontario is facing an increasing number of individuals with addictions and community resources are stretched. Individuals want to be able to access programs and services close to where they live and not have to travel extensively for them.

ASYR remains committed to working with government toward our shared objective of a healthy Ontario. We are confident that with the establishment of a M-RAAM Clinic, there will be a positive impact on the lives of many individuals and families in the region.

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