

## Aboriginal community and Central LHIN working together and identifying barriers to health care

**MARKHAM, Ontario, January 21, 2014** – The Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) hosted members of the Aboriginal community, health service and healing providers in December 2013 to better understand their challenges and barriers related to equitable access to health care services in Central LHIN.

Facilitated by an Urban Aboriginal Community Engagement Facilitator, the attendees participated in a productive discussion that surfaced some of the current barriers to accessing health care programs and services for the Aboriginal community. It also offered opportunities for the LHIN to learn more about the health programs and services currently accessed by the Central LHIN off-reserve Aboriginal population.

“Central LHIN is committed to developing relationships with our Aboriginal residents to learn more about their unique health care needs and challenges, and to work together towards building a more equitable health system,” explained Kim Baker, Chief Executive Officer at Central LHIN. “Ongoing dialogue, collaboration and consultation with members of the Aboriginal community are key steps to ensure we understand the unique health issues faced by this community,” she continued.

The meeting, held on December 16, welcomed a variety of Aboriginal Health Service Providers including the Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, the Barrie Area Native Advisory Circle and the Chippewas of Georgina Island, amongst others. At the meeting, the need and desire for ongoing collaboration between the LHIN and the Aboriginal community to address concerns for this population was identified. This includes improving access to preventative health care services, system navigation, transportation and health information (especially for seniors) and patient advocacy. The need for cultural sensitivity within the health care system, and the importance of building trust with the Aboriginal community, was also noted. In addition, the lack of Aboriginal-focused health services in York Region – such as an Aboriginal Health Access Centre – was identified as a challenge to receiving care in the LHIN.

Elder Vern Asin Harper expressed that he believes things are getting better and Aboriginal communities are getting healthier. “We have the resources, the people and the organizations...we need to come together,” he said.

Key programs have already been implemented in Central LHIN that support off-reserve Aboriginal residents and specifically address some of the health needs of this population. This includes investments in local mental health and addictions services, and diabetes education. In 2013, for example, the Central LHIN funded Addiction Services for York Region to establish a community satellite model of care for a community opioid treatment clinic. The clinic provides methadone maintenance treatment, and the delivery of counseling/case management and support services through five satellite sites across the Central LHIN. All sites provide culturally sensitive services, including those targeted to the Aboriginal population living both on and off-reserve.



*Aboriginal Health Service Providers and the Central LHIN meet to discuss barriers to health care affecting local Aboriginal communities*

Central LHIN's [Integrated Health Service Plan \(IHSP\) 2013-2016](#) articulates the LHIN's ongoing commitment to collaborate and engage with its local Aboriginal population in a culturally sensitive manner. Over the next four years, the Central LHIN will implement an Aboriginal community engagement strategy and incorporate results into the LHIN's planning.

Central LHIN will be conducting engagements with urban Aboriginals in early 2014 to encourage conversations that continue to identify issues impacting health. "Building the capacity of Aboriginal Health Service Providers will help increase equitable access to health care for Aboriginal people," said Baker.

Information gathered from engagements helps inform Central LHIN's future planning so that local solutions can be implemented to achieve more person-centred care.

#### **Quick Facts:**

- The term "Aboriginal people" is a collective name for the original people of North America and their descendants. The Canadian Constitution (the Constitution Act, 1982) recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples — Indians, Métis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. For more common terms and definitions related to Aboriginal peoples and communities in Ontario, see the [Aboriginal glossary of terms](#).
- Aboriginal people represent 0.4% of the LHIN's population or approximately 7,000 people. This is the lowest number amongst all the LHINs.
- The Chippewas of Georgina Island, comprising approximately 200 residents, is Central LHIN's only First Nations on-reserve community.
- The majority of First Nations people in Central LHIN are living off-reserve.
- Census data indicates that the majority of the off-reserve Aboriginal population within the Central LHIN lives in North York, South Simcoe, Northern York Region and Central York Region.
- According to [Statistics Canada's 2011 National Household Survey](#), Ontario has the largest Aboriginal population (301,425) in Canada, representing 21.5% of Canada's total Aboriginal population.
- The [Our Health Counts](#) project found health challenges affecting urban Aboriginal people living in Ontario. This includes high rates of chronic disease and disability, and fair or poor mental health. The study also noted concerns around child development and chronic illnesses affecting children such as chronic ear infections, asthma and allergies.

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