

*Somerset West Community  
Health Centre*

# CENTRE HIGHLIGHTS

*APRIL 2025*



## **EMERGENCY TREATMENT FUND**

We're proud to share that our Centre has secured funding through the Emergency Treatment Fund to support our mental health and addictions outreach efforts, and to address urgent health and housing needs in our community.

This funding comes at a crucial time, following the recent closure of our Consumption & Treatment Service. It represents a significant investment in our treatment and recovery efforts and will help strengthen our work in relation to health and housing to connect people to essential services offered by our Centre and our partners. We continue to witness the devastating toll of the toxic drug crisis on our friends, families, and neighbours.

This support will allow us to distribute harm reduction supplies, respond to drug poisoning, provide life-saving care, and connect individuals to our new HART hub.

We were honoured to be joined by Yasir Naqvi, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and to the Minister of Health; Minister Jenna Sudds; Mayor Mark Sutcliffe; Member of Parliament Mona Fortier; and our valued partners as we shared this important announcement. Our sincere thanks also go to the incredible Somerset West CHC team for their continued dedication to this vital work.

# PRIMARY CARE & REGIONAL PROGRAMS

## MENTAL HEALTH & COUNSELLING

### UJIMA JOB FAIR

Our Mental Health & Counselling team took part in the Ujima Job Fair at Ottawa City Hall, a well-established event connecting job seekers with local employers and career resources. Now in its 14th year, the fair drew over 500 attendees, and our booth stayed busy all day with a steady stream of visitors. The event opened with remarks from Jaku Konbit President Kenneth Campbell and Ottawa City Councillor Rawlson King. It was a great day of networking and opportunity, and we're grateful to everyone who came out and helped make it a success.



## OTTAWA NEWCOMER HEALTH CENTRE

The Ottawa Newcomer Health Centre (ONHC) was invited to participate in this year's Developmental Disabilities & Possibilities Conference, where our team helped raise awareness about the challenges individuals with disabilities face in accessing services. Our team of navigators and language access specialists hosted an information table to promote ONHC's services and encourage stakeholder collaboration. The goal was to spark dialogue and explore innovative solutions to build bridges toward a more inclusive and supportive environment for all.

### HEALTH SCREENING & EDUCATION EVENT

Following the success of the health screening and education event held in January, our Multicultural Health Navigator team, in partnership with Centretown Community Health Centre and the City of Ottawa, organized a second community initiative at a local shelter supporting newcomers and refugees. The Health Services Fair aimed to bring services and information directly to the clients, helping them gain access to:

- Diabetes screening
- Information on where to go for cancer screening
- Tuberculosis (TB) and hepatitis resources
- Sexual health and mental health services

These outreach efforts continue to support and empower newcomers in navigating the healthcare system and improving their overall well-being.





# FAMILY COMMUNITY HEALTH & HARM REDUCTION

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS

As the April 30th tax return deadline approaches, our Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) continues to receive strong demand for this service. Thanks to the hard work of our dedicated volunteers and staff, over 336 clients have registered for the program this year, with 187 returns successfully filed by March 31st.

We've seen fewer requests for virtual tax packages this season, and due to the recent closure of the Consumption & Treatment Service, many of our Harm Reduction clients have been referred to Sandy Hill Community Health Centre for support. We remain committed to helping as many community members as possible access the services they need during this busy season.

### YET KEEN

Yet Keen hosted a workshop on understanding end-of-life in collaboration with Capital Funeral Home & Cemetery. Over 50 seniors joined the seminar and lunch gathering. The workshop included a talk by a Mandarin-speaking lawyer and it generated many questions from seniors who are concerned about their own planning. The discussion was vibrant. In response to this demand, Yet Keen will be inviting a Cantonese-speaking lawyer to give a workshop on power of attorney in May and to answer more questions from the seniors who normally do not have access to pro bono legal guidance.

After a year of planning and development, Yet Keen is excited to launch its new blog: <https://www.yetkeen.ca/>.

Designed with accessibility in mind and guided by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, the updated blog replaces our previous site that was first created in 2012.



The new platform offers a more inclusive experience for Chinese-speaking seniors, caregivers, and community stakeholders, with content now fully available in English, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese. Seniors can now easily access resources like exercise videos from home, while a dedicated section for volunteers has already sparked a surge in new applications. Although some sections are still being finalized, we're proud to share this fresh new face of Yet Keen with our community.



## COMMUNITY HEALTH PROMOTION

March was a vibrant month for the Community Health Promotion team, filled with meaningful gatherings, new partnerships, and ongoing efforts to strengthen social connections across Mechanicsville and LeBreton Flats.

The Mechanicsville community came together for a beautiful and successful Iftar dinner event which was held at the Keith Brown Centre. Over 50 residents attended to share a meal, connect, and celebrate in a warm, welcoming atmosphere. With support from Somerset West CHC, Ottawa Community Housing, and Councillor Jeff Leiper, the event exceeded expectations and sparked strong interest in making this an annual tradition. Earlier in the month, families also enjoyed a March Break Movie & Pizza Day, offering local children a fun, safe space to unwind and bond with peers during the school break.



Meanwhile, our weekly Tea & Toast drop-in at 18 Burnside Avenue continues to foster community among Mechanicsville residents. Each Thursday, neighbors gather to share stories over tea and a light meal, helping to ease social isolation and nurture a sense of belonging. These simple but meaningful gatherings offer residents a safe space to connect, support one another, and feel more rooted in their community.

Over at the Sunshine Hub in LeBreton Flats, our work gained well-deserved recognition in March with a [feature on CTV News](#), spotlighting our partnership with United Way and the impact of grassroots community action. Weekly food distributions and cooking workshops continue to support families with essential resources and skills, while initiatives like our Wednesday Breakfast Club provide not just a healthy meal but also access to services that address broader health and social needs.

New initiatives are also taking root. Friday night Bingo, launched March 28, has quickly become a favorite, bringing joy and connection to residents looking for a safe and social way to end their week. We've also been listening closely to our community — through a recent survey in partnership with the University of Ottawa and ReLink, we're gathering input from children and youth in LeBreton Flats to help shape programs that reflect their needs and priorities.

Across both communities, these efforts reflect our ongoing commitment to building inclusive, responsive spaces where residents can connect, thrive, and lead the change they want to see.

## ROCHESTER HEIGHTS COMMUNITY HOUSE

March was a vibrant and impactful month at Rochester Heights Community House as we continued to connect with and support seniors, families, newcomers, and tenants through a wide range of inclusive and accessible programs. With over 500 client interactions this month, our space remained a hub of community engagement, wellness, and care.



We were thrilled to launch two new local partnerships with Second Harvest and Cornerstone Housing for Women to enhance our food rescue efforts. Thanks to these collaborations, we rescued and delivered 280 lbs of frozen food and distributed 32 turkeys, significantly increasing our capacity to meet food security needs. Our other food support programs remained strong throughout the month. Deliveries from the Dalhousie Food Cupboard reached over 30 tenants with mobility challenges, and our on-site Emergency Food Cupboard provided essential support to individuals facing urgent needs. Meanwhile, our weekly Breakfast Club brought together 40+ seniors and tenants, offering a warm meal and an even warmer sense of community.

Programming for all ages continued to flourish. Seniors enjoyed weekly low-impact exercise classes filled with movement and laughter, art sessions led in partnership with the Ottawa School of Arts, and distributed swimming passes through our collaboration with the Plant Recreation Centre. Children engaged in creative after-school art sessions and received daily care and activities through our weekday After-School Program, except during March Break.

Community-led activities like bingo brought tenants together, while our daily client support services saw increased demand — particularly our Tax Clinic, which supported over 75 individuals through onsite and virtual services. We also assisted community members with system navigation tasks such as contacting government agencies and accessing technology for job applications and paperwork.

Throughout March, our team was energized by the strong partnerships, the resilience of our community, and the small moments of connection that define Rochester Heights. As we look ahead, we remain committed to building a welcoming, inclusive space where everyone feels supported.

## HARM REDUCTION

As we bid farewell to our Consumption & Treatment Service (CTS), which closed on February 28th, we want to acknowledge the dedication and resilience of our Harm Reduction team, who have been working tirelessly behind the scenes to shape the future. On March 26th, we came together for a Letting Go Ceremony to honor the hard work and commitment of everyone who contributed to the CTS. The unwavering dedication of our staff, partners, and the people we served has been truly remarkable, especially in the face of challenges. The impact of the safe spaces and human connections we fostered will not be forgotten. While we continue to process feelings of grief, frustration, and sadness over this loss, we also look ahead with hope. Our commitment remains steadfast — to build a strong team at HART Hub, one that upholds the values that first brought us to this work and continues to serve the people with dignity and care.

Our Homelessness & Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub officially launched on April 1st, operating Monday – Friday from 12 PM – 4 PM; and 10 AM – 4 PM on weekends. Services offered in this first phase include: shower services & basic needs supplies; daily meal service, with lunch available 7 days a week; and leisure activities to promote social connection and well-being. We are eager to reconnect with our clients, many of whom we have not seen since the closure of the CTS. This new chapter is an opportunity to continue our mission with renewed energy and purpose.

## ANONYMOUS HIV TESTING

March was a dynamic and engaging month for the Anonymous HIV Testing team, as we continued to provide accessible testing services and expand our outreach across the city. We were proud to take part in the Newcomer Health Info Fair organized by Centretown Community Health Centre, where we offered sexual health education and on-site anonymous HIV testing. The event was a great success, with support from a Peer Equity Navigator (PEN) from CO-CREATH, who joined us in connecting with newcomers and sharing important health resources.



This month, we also partnered with the community response team to deliver overdose response training for 2SLGBTQ+ service providers at the Rainbow Service Provider Network Meeting, supporting frontline workers with the tools and knowledge to respond effectively and compassionately.

We continued our learning and collaboration by attending Hole-istic Health, an event hosted by MAX Ottawa that featured speakers from the Get a Kit team and Dr. McPherson from the Ottawa Hospital. We also tuned into webinars by CANcure, exploring cutting-edge HIV cure research, and another focused on mobilizing PrEP uptake within African, Caribbean, and Black communities.

Our anonymous HIV testing services remain active throughout the city, including regular drop-ins at 55 Eccles Street every Monday, and outreach clinics at the University of Ottawa, Club Ottawa, the MAX Ottawa evening site, Ottawa Booth Centre men's shelter, and Operation Come Home. These ongoing efforts reflect our commitment to making HIV testing accessible, judgment-free, and rooted in community care.

## ACB/HIV PREVENTION STRATEGY

To mark International Women's Day, we hosted a vibrant and empowering event for women in collaboration with several community partners. The celebration brought together women from diverse backgrounds for a day of connection, learning, and self-care. The event featured several informative sessions on mental health and HIV/AIDS prevention and care, offering tools and resources to support women's well-being and health literacy.

Participants also had the opportunity to engage with outreach teams from other organizations, explore wellness through Zumba and reflexology sessions, and enjoy thoughtful gifts provided by local business owners. A special highlight was a fashion talk led by a Black fashion professional, who shared insights on style, confidence, and cultural expression. Thanks to the inclusion of free childcare services, the event was accessible to more women and families, contributing to a strong turnout and an atmosphere of support and celebration.

# OTTAWA BLACK MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

In March, Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition (OBMHC) members came together to deliver 7 days of programming for Black Mental Health Week 2025. Under the theme "For Community, By Community", OBMHC delivered all our events in person for the first time ever.

Offerings included our first ever men's event, a women's event, community expo and the Community of Practice conference and closing event. OBMHC welcomed Mayor Mark Sutcliffe, Councilor Rawlson King and Indigenous Elder Grandmother Karen at the launch on March 3rd, hosted by Suzanne Obiorah. More than 290 participants registered for events, with the conference being the highest rated and well attended. After receiving feedback from the Executive Board and reviewing upcoming budgets for 2025-2026, OBMHC members will shift to a different format in 2026 in order to maximize financial resources and staff capacity.

Funding for the Coalition will drop significantly in the coming fiscal year as CASMARI funding from Heritage Canada ends March 31 and Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) funding for Counselling Connect ends June 30. Unless additional funding is secured by June 30th, partners will no longer have funding to provide services on the portal. The portal itself is in jeopardy and discussions with JFS (who currently administers the portal) indicate that funding for the CareDove platform could end March 31, 2026.

The community of practice project, funded by Heritage Canada, wraps up on March 31st and plans are in place to leverage city funding to continue to deliver regularly scheduled, scaled down versions of group clinical supervision for participants. This group supervision will also allow the Coalition to leverage limited funding for Counselling Connect counsellors by providing supervision access to therapists from June 2025 until March 2026.

With the recent departure of Project Facilitator Basant Mohamed, OBMHC staff capacity has been significantly reduced. Basant was an incredible asset to the Coalition for 8 months, however without ongoing funding she moved on to a permanent position with benefits. After 5 years and 7 admin staff changes, staffing support positions for the Coalition continues to be a recurring and extremely time-consuming challenge. In order to facilitate coordination and provide meeting notes in a timely fashion, Otter AI and other AI products for translation etc. will be employed by OBMHC coordination staff. Looking ahead to April, OBHC members will have the opportunity to connect in person at our bi-annual all-members meeting on April 30th.

