

Somerset West Community  
Health Centre

# CENTRE HIGHLIGHTS

MARCH 2025



## BLACK HISTORY MONTH

In celebration of Black History Month, our Centre's Black History Month Committee organized a truly joyful and inspiring event at the ACB Wellness Centre. This event brought together community members of all ages in a vibrant space of belonging, pride, and excellence. Through powerful storytelling, music, and shared experiences, we honored the rich history, achievements, and leadership of Black communities. The event was a testament to the strength, resilience, and ongoing contributions of Black leaders, past and present, who have paved the way for a more equitable future.



It also fostered a deep sense of unity and connection, reminding us of the importance of recognizing and uplifting Black voices — not just in February, but throughout the year. From engaging discussions to cultural performances, every moment reflected the spirit of Black excellence and the vital role of community in preserving and celebrating Black history.

Somerset West Community Health Centre has been at the forefront of transformative work to address health disparities in Black communities. Our Centre was deeply honored to be recognized by Councillor Rawlson King in his Black History Month address to City Council for our leadership in advancing Black health equity.

In January, we announced that we will receive an investment of \$1.67 million from Ontario Health to advance the provincial Black Health Plan in Ottawa — a significant milestone in our ongoing commitment to health equity. This funding will allow us to expand essential services, including hiring more Black health professionals, extending clinic hours, and strengthening partnerships

with Black-led organizations. These initiatives are critical in dismantling systemic barriers and ensuring that Black communities in Ottawa have improved access to culturally responsive healthcare. We are proud to continue this vital work alongside our partners and the broader community.

### **INVESTING IN COMMUNITY HEALTH**

Somerset West CHC partnered with Ottawa Community Health Centres to organize a live webinar called [“Investing in community health: The solution to our healthcare crisis”](#). Michelle Hurtubise Executive Director of Centretown Community Health Centre, and Dr. Ivy Bourgeault from the University of Ottawa, shared the potential of community-based care to solve the healthcare crisis. They emphasized that team-based care is essential to address the primary care access crisis, highlighting CHCs as a leading team-based model of care. A video of the webinar is [available here](#).

## **INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AWARENESS**

As part of our commitment to fostering a more inclusive and culturally safe workplace, our Leadership Team has made a commitment to completing the Indigenous Cultural Safety in Mental Health course through the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council (IPHCC). This training is part of IPHCC’s Anishinaabe Mino’Ayaawin – People in Good Health Indigenous Safety learning program and is designed to enhance our understanding of Indigenous perspectives on mental health. The course explores the historical and ongoing impacts shaping Indigenous mental health today, equipping participants with trauma-informed, strengths-based, and culturally safe care strategies.

By taking this training, our leadership team aims to deepen our knowledge of the social, historical, and systemic factors that influence Indigenous health experiences. This initiative aligns with our broader commitment to reconciliation and supports Truth & Reconciliation Call to Action #23 (iii), which calls for increased cultural competency training for healthcare professionals. We recognize that fostering culturally safe mental health practices is essential in building stronger, more trusting relationships within Indigenous communities, and we are proud to take this important step in our journey toward meaningful change.





# FAMILY COMMUNITY HEALTH & HARM REDUCTION

## ALTERNATE NEIGHBOURHOOD CRISIS RESPONSE (ANCHOR)

A press conference was held in partnership with the City of Ottawa, Centretown Community Health Centre, and the Community Navigation of Eastern Ontario to announce the release of ANCHOR's formative evaluation data, and showcase the program's impact in its first 11 weeks. The data confirms what we have long advocated for — our community needs a compassionate, community-led crisis response service. Between August 15 and October 31, 2025, ANCHOR received 1,310 calls through Community Navigation of Eastern Ontario's 211 service, with 626 of those resulting in a crisis team dispatch. Remarkably, 92.05% of crisis interactions were resolved without police involvement, demonstrating ANCHOR's effectiveness in de-escalating crises and connecting individuals with the right supports. These early results highlight the urgent need for alternatives to traditional emergency response models, reinforcing ANCHOR's role in transforming mental health and substance use crisis intervention in Ottawa.

This data release marks a significant milestone in our shared efforts to build a more responsive, trauma-informed, and community-driven support system. The formative evaluation provides valuable insights to refine service delivery, improve data collection, and ensure operational excellence as ANCHOR continues to evolve. Through collaboration with the City of Ottawa's Community Safety and Well-Being Office, Centretown Community Health Centre, Community Navigation of Eastern Ontario, and our dedicated crisis response teams, we are working toward long-term, systemic change.



## HARM REDUCTION

The Needle Exchange and Safer Inhalation (NESI) team conducted a small survey with clients to better understand the issue of discarded and broken pipes in our community. By actively listening to these perspectives, we hope to develop practical solutions that address community concerns while upholding a harm reduction approach rooted in dignity, safety, and respect.



Though concerns have been raised about the surge in pipes recovered in our neighbourhood, we found that this number is much smaller compared to the amount of drug equipment safely left in drop-off boxes at community health centers. Clients were asked questions surrounding disposal practices, whether they had noticed an increase in discarded pipes, and what ideas they had for promoting safe and responsible disposal practices.

## ANONYMOUS HIV TESTING

The Anonymous HIV Testing team attended the Pink Brick Road Tour hosted in Ottawa by the Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance (GMSH!). We gathered with local service providers from public health, AIDS service organizations, and other key organizations involved in HIV prevention, education, and care. Grounded in the HIV Action Plan to 2030 by Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS (OACHA), we put our heads together to develop a stronger regional plan to reduce new HIV infections, promote HIV testing among Ottawa residents who do not know their HIV status, and connect people living with HIV to high quality care.



Our team also attended the ACB HIV Health Forum hosted by the AIDS Committee of Ottawa. Speakers at this event provided key updates from HIV prevention and care services serving African, Caribbean, and Black communities.

For HIV is Not a Crime Awareness Day, we joined the Canadian Coalition to Reform HIV Criminalization and the HIV Legal Network at a local event. We had an opportunity to learn about their ongoing efforts to decriminalize people living with HIV across Canada. We also gained a deeper understanding of how HIV criminalization affects individuals and shared ideas on how we can better support people living with HIV in our communities. To learn more about their important work, visit [www.hivcriminalization.ca](http://www.hivcriminalization.ca).

At the end of the month, our team attended a vigil hosted by Overdose Prevention Ottawa to remember those we have lost to the ongoing drug crisis. This powerful gathering provided a space for our community to come together, grieve, and reflect on the lives taken too soon by the war on drugs. We are deeply grateful to Overdose Prevention Ottawa for organizing such a meaningful event, reminding us that no one is alone in the fight for justice and dignity for people who use drugs. Their continued efforts are vital in the struggle for change and support.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS

Our Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) supports our clients and community members with filing their income tax and benefit returns with dedicated support of our CVITP volunteers. Registration for this service has begun, and we will continue to offer hybrid services, combining in-person sessions with our existing virtual options.

### UPCOMING CLINICS:

30 Rosemount Avenue

10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Tuesday's between March 25 - April 29th

865 Gladstone Avenue

10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Wednesday's between March 26 - April 30th



## YET KEEN SENIORS' DAY CENTRE

At Yet Keen, we continue to foster connection and well-being through engaging workshops designed to support seniors in their daily lives. Recently, Catherine Liang, an outreach nurse at SWCHC, led an informative Fall Prevention workshop. Seniors learned practical strategies to reduce fall risks, stay active, and maintain their independence. Catherine's expertise and approachable style kept the session interactive and empowering seniors with knowledge to stay safe and mobile.



We were also thrilled to continue our Joy of Cooking workshops, where Yet Keen seniors had the opportunity to learn how to make traditional Vietnamese pho. With the guidance of our dedicated volunteer Christine, participants explored the flavors and techniques behind this beloved dish, turning cooking into a shared experience of culture and connection. These workshops not only celebrate food but also strengthen our community by bringing people together through learning and laughter.



## ROCHESTER HEIGHTS COMMUNITY HOUSE

Rochester Heights Community House has made significant strides by re-establishing key partnerships, launching new programs, and continuing our longstanding services. Our efforts remain focused on enriching community life, providing essential support services, and celebrating the diverse cultures that make up our community. We have successfully re-established our partnership with the 506 Bronson Rooming House, strengthening our network and collaborative efforts; and continue to support and engage with the French Tenants Community, to ensure residents have a needed resources.

Our community programs continue to provide valuable support and engagement for residents. The adult art class remains a creative outlet, while the After School Program, though reduced in size, continues to offer a safe and supportive space for youth. We recently launched a Senior Fitness Program to promote wellness among older adults and introduced a Free Tax Program to assist low-income individuals and families. The Breakfast Club now serves 50 to 60 tenants every Thursday, ensuring a nutritious start to their day, and our food delivery service remains a vital resource for eligible tenants facing food insecurity.

This month has been a dynamic period of growth and community building at Rochester Heights Community House. With re-established partnerships, the launch of new initiatives, and continued success in our existing services, we remain dedicated to enhancing the lives of our tenants.



# OTTAWA BLACK MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

February was an eventful and impactful month for the Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition (OBMHC), as representatives actively engaged with community members at four major Black History Month events in Ottawa. Our presence was warmly received at the Black History Month Launch event at the National Arts Centre on February 1st, highlighting the Coalition’s ongoing commitment to supporting Black mental health and well-being.



A special highlight of the month was the recognition of OBMHC Executive Board member Sophia Jacob, who received the prestigious Community Builder Award from Black History Ottawa. This honor reflects her dedication to advocacy and community empowerment. Additionally, Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition exhibited at the Rising 2025: Black Excellence in Canadian Policy conference, hosted by the Black Executive Network at the Rogers Centre, further strengthening its network and advocacy efforts at a national level.



To expand their reach and awareness, Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition also pre-recorded segments for two local radio shows, [Reggae Rockers](#) and [Black on Black](#), which aired on March 1st. These discussions highlighted the Coalition’s work in the community and provided insight into the upcoming Black Mental Health Week events. OBMHC remains committed to advancing conversations about Black mental health and looks forward to continuing its engagement and advocacy in the months ahead.



## CHILDREN & YOUTH

It has been a busy and rewarding month as we continue providing essential services for families with children from newborn to 12 years old. Our commitment to barrier-free access remains strong, ensuring that programs are available in local schools, community centers, and our main sites. By bringing our services directly to where families live and learn, we strive to create welcoming and accessible spaces for children to grow, play, and thrive. We look forward to another month of meaningful engagement and support for our young community members!