

*Somerset West Community
Health Centre*

CENTRE HIGHLIGHTS

JUNE 2025



TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE AWARD

Somerset West CHC was among the recipients of the 2025 Transformative Change Awards, earning the prestigious Community Health Champion award jointly for our work in Harm Reduction Advocacy. This award recognizes organizations making extraordinary contributions to delivering equitable, low-barrier, wraparound primary health care — and this year specifically honors leadership in Supervised Consumption and Consumption & Treatment Services across Ontario, including those that continue operating and those that were forced to close. We are honored to stand alongside these leaders in advocating for evidence-based substance-use policies and integrated health care services grounded in equity and harm reduction.



This recognition underscores our ongoing dedication to transformative change, demonstrating our leadership in supporting individuals impacted by substance use and championing equitable access to primary health care. It highlights the strength of our collective impact within the Alliance network to advance inclusive, evidence-based solutions—even amidst challenging policy environments.

STAFF APPRECIATION

We held a staff appreciation event that brought together colleagues from our various sites to connect, reflect, and recognize the people behind the work. A special moment was set aside to acknowledge long-standing staff — particularly those who have been with the Centre for over 20 years.

We are deeply grateful for the continued dedication and the collective passion of our entire team; and the vibrancy they bring to this work.



OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH BOARD OF HEALTH DELEGATION

Somerset West's CEO Suzanne Obiorah spoke before the Ottawa Public Health Board of Health delegation, to lend support to their overdose prevention and response efforts. Each day, we see the impacts of this crisis, and we take great care to serve communities experiencing some of Ottawa's highest rates of drug poisoning, homelessness, and poverty. Since launching Phase 1 of our HART Hub on April 1, visits have steadily risen — signaling growing trust in the program. While the HART Hub offers hope, continued collaboration with Ottawa Public Health and community partners remains essential to address this ongoing public health crisis and ensure critical gaps in harm reduction is addressed. [The full meeting is available by clicking here.](#)

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AWARENESS

We had the privilege of having the Indigenous Cultural Facilitator present to offer opening remarks at a HART Hub training session for Somerset West staff and community partners. These opportunities continue to support team growth and strengthen our shared commitment to reconciliation and inclusive care. As spring transitioned into summer, community involvement remained strong despite the construction at Dundonald Park. The installation of a new splash pad has brought some temporary disruptions, but hasn't prevented community members from attending weekly gatherings in the park.

Our partnerships remain vital. We continue to receive generous donations from Plato's Closet and Shawna's Outreach, which are helping to meet the needs of many of our community members.



We held a Pre-Summer Solstice Event at Minto Park. In partnership with Makatew, we offered a Medicine Bundle Workshop, where clients will have the chance to create their own medicine bags. We're grateful to be collaborating with several community organizations for this event, including Inner City Health, Centretown Community Health Centre, Street Smarts, Jewish Family Services, the City of Ottawa's outreach teams, and local veterinary services offering care for community members' pets. The AIDS Committee of Ottawa (ACO) will generously provide a delicious BBQ for all attendees.

FAMILY COMMUNITY HEALTH & HARM REDUCTION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

YET KEEN

Over the past few weeks, Yet Keen hosted a series of enriching events that brought connection, learning, and joy to our senior community. We welcomed Cantonese-speaking lawyer James Siu, who generously offered his time for a pro bono seminar on Power of Attorney. This workshop proved highly beneficial as twenty-five seniors gained valuable legal planning insights.

In celebration of Asian Heritage Month, Yet Keen seniors participated in a family collage art workshop organized by the Canadian War Museum.

The workshop was guided by artist Don Kwan, and seniors were joined by guests from the Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre (OCCSC). As part of the "Personal History Collage Workshop", participants were invited to bring copies of their family photos to create meaningful 2D collages reflecting their personal histories. The session was followed by a guided tour of "Last Voices", a powerful exhibition featuring the stories of veterans from the Second World War. Many thanks to Don Kwan for his inspiring guidance and to the museum staff for their warm support and hospitality!

This month, Somerset West's Chinese Outreach Nurse Catherine Liang joined forces with Foot Care Specialist Noriko Shibata to lead an engaging workshop on Reflexology and Foot Health. Together, they explored common foot issues and emphasized the importance of proper care, helping our senior community understand how maintaining healthy feet supports overall wellness and mobility.



To cap off these experiences, 44 residents took part in a spring outing to Parc Omega, where they spotted various types of wildlife, and had a chance to feed the elk and deer right from the bus. Filled with laughter and delight, the trip left everyone looking forward to their next adventure together!

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS

As of May 31, 2025, our Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) completed nearly 400 tax returns through both onsite and virtual services. Many clients required special assistance — some with multi-year filings spanning up to 10 years. We are especially grateful for our 12 dedicated and professional volunteers who made this possible.

Looking ahead, we will continue to offer year-round virtual tax filing support for our most vulnerable clients and community members; collect client satisfaction feedback (in partnership with other CVITP agencies in Ottawa) of clients served during the tax season, to improve services and support a potential grant from the City of Ottawa; and are preparing for our annual Volunteer Appreciation Lunch, where we will celebrate long-term service milestones and share data insights from March–April 2025. Finally, we will be submitting an application for the Canada Revenue Agency's 2025 CVITP funding, to keep this vital community support going strong.

ROCHESTER HEIGHTS COMMUNITY HOUSE

Rochester Heights Community House continued to engage and support local seniors, families, and children through a variety of inclusive programs. We observed growing participation in our senior and food support programs, and launched preparations for our summer programming.

As part of our Client Support programming, volunteer-led exercise sessions welcomed eight seniors each Friday, 20 swimming passes were distributed to promote aquatic activity, and four senior art classes encouraged creative self-expression. For children, four Wednesday afternoon art sessions were offered to encourage skill-building and engagement.

Our Food Security program remained strong, with Dalhousie Food Cupboard deliveries reaching many tenants in week three and four, ensuring consistent support for seniors and families in need. Additionally, through the Second Harvest Food Rescue initiative, we rescued and distributed 180lbs of frozen food and 40lbs of bread, and supported roughly ten individuals through our Emergency Food Cupboard.



Through ongoing House Initiatives, we maintained our Thursday Breakfast Club, drawing approximately 50 seniors each week to enjoy breakfast, social connection, and conversation. Our After-School Program, which began operating daily in May, has consistently welcomed 14–16 children each day, and we've also started registration for summer camp.

Our Partnerships & Collaborations remained robust: we partnered with Sunshine Hub and our Mental Health & Counseling team to plan wellness activities for ACB tenants, engaged in sector-wide initiatives like the United for All Coalition and United Way Anti-Hate facilitator training, and sustained resource-sharing support with Cornerstone Women's House and John Howard Society Rooming House. We also welcomed a new partnership with Loblaws for regular bread donations.

HARM REDUCTION

We're excited to share that we've now launched our Peer Outreach Team. Operating from 12:00 PM to 8:00 PM, the team is composed of peer-led staff who are uniquely positioned to build trust and connect individuals with resources and support, including services offered through the HART Hub. We also initiated a collaboration with the Community Response Team (CRT) to enhance coordination and service delivery. Looking ahead, we will focus on capacity building next month to further support the development and effectiveness of the team, and expanding our operating hours to better meet the needs of the community.

NEEDLE EXCHANGE AND SAFER INHALATION

Over the past month, our Needle Exchange and Safer Inhalation (NESI) program successfully revived the Women's Breakfast Group — a biweekly breakfast program geared towards providing a space for women who use drugs to connect with each other and NESI outreach workers while enjoying a delicious breakfast. It was also a great opportunity for us to try out and show off the new kitchen space in the Somerset Room!

ANONYMOUS HIV TESTING

This month, the Anonymous HIV Testing team met with HIV care providers at Module G at the Ottawa Hospital to continue to smooth our referral process for people living with HIV exploring HIV treatment options. We also had the opportunity to attend the 2025 Ottawa Hospital Biennial HIV Update, featuring key updates from physicians and clinical researchers on HIV treatments on the horizon, new guidelines for anal cancer screening, and new advancements in PrEP for HIV prevention.

The annual AIDS Candlelight Memorial was held by Bruce House and the AIDS Committee of Ottawa. Thank you to both organizations as well as everyone who joined us to remember those we have lost and to be in community together on a sunny Saturday afternoon.

In addition, we continued to work closely with our community partners, attending the regular Rainbow Service Provider Network Meeting (with staff from the NESI daytime team!) and learned more about ways to support 2SLGBTQ+ refugee claimants across our organizations. We also met with different programs in Community Engagement at Somerset West CHC and are working on new events in the summertime to bring our programs together.

Internally, we provided the first of two education sessions for HART Hub staff exploring HIV, harm reduction, and sexual health. We had a strong discussion on the ongoing criminalization of HIV and the ways HIV stigma prevents people from accessing HIV testing. This is a key step in working together to connect clients in the HART Hub to high quality HIV testing options and supportive connections to HIV prevention and care services. We're looking forward to our next workshop!



ACB/HIV PREVENTION STRATEGY

The ACB/HIV prevention team participated in a well-attended mental health event hosted by the African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO) themed “Joy as Resilience,” alongside joining the United Way’s United for All anti-hate coalition meeting. These events were effective in bringing service providers and community members together to discuss strategies for restoring safe, supportive spaces for these conversations to take place.

CHILDREN & YOUTH

As our neighborhood schools and community associations host a variety of events, our Early Childhood Development Workers have been actively involved, offering fun and engaging activities for children while connecting with parents to share information about the services we provide.

Parents and community members came together to celebrate ten little graduates from our Nanny Goat Hill Nursery School. Families cheered on the graduates as they received their certificates, and came together to mark this special milestone with food, games, and lots of laughter.

OTTAWA BLACK MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition (OBMHC) partnered with The Royal Ottawa, African Canadian Association of Ottawa and SGA Church to provide mental health first aid training to community members and community workers. 75 participants took part in the online and in-person training at three locations across the city. This training was specifically adapted for Black communities and was delivered in collaboration with Black facilitators and funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Based on the overwhelming demand, OBMHC is hoping to run a similar training again in the coming year.

In Addition, Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition members donated two bags of books to the Lukasa Library project. This initiative is led by Dr. Clyde Ledbetter and seeks to create an afri-centric community library for Ottawa. OBMHC will continue to support the collection of books and encourage donations to this wonderful initiative.

Towards the end of the month, Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition staff participated in 2 days of Crisis Intervention Training with the Ottawa Police Service, providing information and resources to officers who may be responding to mental health calls in the community. This work is part of the implementation of recommendations that stemmed from the Abdirahman Abdi Inquest.



PRIMARY CARE & REGIONAL PROGRAMS

MENTAL HEALTH & COUNSELING

We're thrilled to share that, thanks to the generous funding from the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility, we've received funding for a Seniors Active Living Centre (SALC) to support Vietnamese Seniors. This initiative will create a welcoming space where Vietnamese Seniors can stay active, connected, and engaged through weekly wellness activities like health education, community cooking classes, exercise groups, socials, and arts programming — all culturally anchored in Vietnamese culture and offered in the language the Seniors are most comfortable with.



Seniors Active Living Centre programs are helping to protect the well-being of seniors by offering cultural, learning and recreational programs that promote health, active living and social connections. We are proud to contribute to the success of the Somerset West Community Health Centre and their dedication to providing an inclusive and culturally rich space for Vietnamese seniors to thrive” said Raymond Cho, Minister for Seniors and Accessibility.

We're deeply grateful for our ongoing partnership with the Vietnamese Canadian Community of Ottawa (VCCO) and honored to receive this funding support from the Ministry. Together, we're building a stronger foundation for programs that celebrate and care for our Vietnamese community.

RACIAL TRAUMA TRAINING

Somerset West Community Health Centre was thrilled to welcome Dr. Monnica Williams — a leading expert in the field of racial trauma — to deliver a free, two-day training tailored for clinical counselling staff and therapists. Although most therapists have encountered clients experiencing race-based stress, few have been trained to assess or treat it. This workshop addresses that critical gap, offering a structured cognitive-behavioral (CBT) approach informed by empirical research and clinical experience. Beyond the training itself, this was a meaningful opportunity for community building—bringing together over 13 community agencies to learn alongside one another. We're proud that this marks the beginning of continued collaboration, with ongoing case consultations and training planned over the coming year to support community-based mental health clinicians in compassionately responding to the impacts of racial trauma in our communities.

