

Introduction to Family Health Teams

This introduction, Document #1, is part of the Wave 3 Family Health Team InfoKit, which contains the following documents:

- **Document #1 - Introduction to Family Health Teams:**
This document provides an overview of Family Health Teams, Role, Guiding Principles and a status report on implementation
- **Document #2 - Application for Financial Assistance (Seed Funding):**
Funding of up to \$2000 is available to assist groups with costs associated with completing the *Family Health Team Wave 3 Application Form*. It defines eligibility criteria and expenditures covered by this funding.
- **Document #3 - Family Health Team Wave 3 Application Form and Checklist:**
This application must be submitted if you wish to establish a Family Health Team. The *Application* is accompanied by the *Guide to Completing a Family Health Team Application*.
- **Document #4 - Guide to Completing a Family Health Team Application:**
This guide accompanies the *Family Health Team Wave 3 Application Form and Checklist*. It provides useful advice and tips for filling out the application. It is highly recommended that all applicants read the guide before, or while, filling out the application.
- **Document #5: Contact Information Consent Form:**
This consent form grants the ministry permission to release your contact information if your application is successful.

Introduction to Family Health Teams

Primary health care renewal is the foundation on which the transformation of Ontario's health care system is built. It encompasses improved access to primary health care services and will help weave the disparate parts of our health system together. The implementation of Family Health Teams is the central, transformation strategy through which the government will provide more Ontarians with access to primary health care.

Family Health Teams are locally driven primary health care delivery organizations which may include family physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses and a range of other health professionals who are committed to working together collaboratively to provide comprehensive, accessible, coordinated primary health care service to a defined population. This approach allows physicians to work as part of a team with other health providers to focus on keeping patients healthy. Physicians, nurse practitioners and other members of the team will benefit by practicing together in a positive working environment, sharing and benefiting from the complementary knowledge and skills of their colleagues.

Family Health Teams may include mental health workers, physician specialists, diagnostic services, linkages to home care services, some outpatient surgery services. Family Health Teams will also serve as a focus for chronic disease management and community-based health promotion and disease prevention activities in conjunction with local public health units and other community-based health care organizations.

The Vision

The ministry is committed to working with our province's dedicated health care professionals to improve the health care system because Ontarians deserve the best health care.

This is part of the government's goal of transforming the health care system to make it more patient-centred and responsive to local needs.

Family Health Teams are the "navigator" of the health care system, providing or ensuring the provision of care as close to home as possible, ensuring system access and continuity of care. Family Health Teams will improve access to primary health care through the introduction of interdisciplinary health teams including physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners and pharmacists. These teams will be developed with community and provider input and will be structured to meet specific needs of the communities they serve.

Family Health Teams will build on the successes of the past while providing core primary health care to the communities.

Current Status

On April 15, 2005, Premier Dalton McGuinty, with Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman, announced that 69 Family Health Teams had been awarded across the province after the first wave of applications. This number exceeds the target set by the government of 45 Family Health Teams for Spring 2005. These Family Health Teams are in various stages of implementation. For more information on these Family Health Teams, please see the Ministry's website at http://www.health.gov.on.ca/transformation/fht/fht_mn.html.

The second wave of 31 successful applicants was announced on December 9, 2005, and were selected from the original 214 applications submitted in February 2005.

The government has set the goal of establishing 150 Family Health Teams by 2007-2008. It is expected that 50 new Wave 3 Family Health Teams will be selected from this second application process.

What will Family Health Teams do?

Family Health Teams will:

1. Provide **comprehensive primary health care** services through an interdisciplinary team of doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners and other health care professionals as determined by local needs
2. Provide patients with **expanded access** through the Telephone Health Advisory Service (THAS) and extended hours of practice
3. Provide **system navigation** and care coordination – linking patients to other parts of the health care system such as acute care, long-term care, public health, mental health, addictions and community programs and services
4. In larger centres, may include **diagnostic and outpatient services** such as X-ray, ultrasound, and minor surgery
5. Emphasize **health promotion**, illness prevention, early detection/diagnosis
6. Serve as a central driving force for the development of new comprehensive community based **chronic disease management** and self-care programs
7. Provide **patient-centred care** where the patient is a key member of the team and uses information and support to make informed decisions on how to manage his/her self-care needs
8. Be linked with other health care organizations at the community level and, in general, be adapted to the needs of the specific **community** through some form of participation at the governance level

9. Use **information technology** as the backbone of system integration, linking patient records across different health care settings giving providers timely access to test results and other important data

Guiding Principles

The following are principles that the ministry will use to guide the development and implementation of Family Health Teams in Ontario.

Flexibility and Choice

Family Health Teams will not be a one size fits all approach. There are diverse communities across Ontario and there must be flexibility in the size, scope and focus of family health teams to allow them to be tailored to meet the needs of the local population. There must also be choice for the providers and communities in key elements of Family Health Teams including governance structure and programs that will be delivered.

Community and Provider Partnerships

Community representatives, local health delivery organizations and health care professionals will be facilitated and encouraged to work together to develop Family Health Teams that reflect the unique needs of the population served and develop collaborative working relationships that will enhance access and continuity of care.

Build on Existing Models and Successes

Ontario has a rich history of leadership in primary care delivery and access. Family Health Teams will not replace these successful models but will build upon their strengths and learn from their challenges.

Team Based Care

Family Health Teams will be interdisciplinary teams of providers, including physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners and other health care professionals. The make-up of these teams will be tailored to the size of the population served and their health care needs.

Local Integration

Family Health Teams will work with other local health care delivery organizations to develop partnerships that will maximize opportunities for local collaboration to improve access and continuity of care. Such relationships may include CCACs, local hospitals, and public health units, long-term care facilities and voluntary associations.

Patient Focus

Family Health Teams will be patient-focused through patient enrolment and population based health planning.

Evidence-Based Balanced Approach

Family Health Teams will progressively evolve through a balanced use of evidence-based practice, continuous re-evaluation, together with flexibility for innovation and responsiveness to local community and provider concerns.

Transparency and Consultation

Open communication, transparent and decision-making on the design, development and implementation of Family Health Teams. Stakeholder and community input and consultation will maximize acceptance and commitment to common goals, respective responsibilities, and mutual accountability.

Fostering Changes Through an Incentive-Based Approach

An incentive-based approach will encourage integrative and creative solution to achieve the Family Health Team objectives.

Why Family Health Teams?

Ontario has made significant progress on achieving the goals established during the 2003 First Ministers Health Accord for primary health care services. Some very successful models of primary health care delivery already exist including, Community Health Centres, Health Service Organizations and the Group Health Centre in Sault Ste Marie. What hasn't happened is a significant investment in interdisciplinary team care, and provision for local flexibility.

Many Ontarians are having difficulty in accessing needed primary health care and in finding a family physician. Family Health Teams will expand this access through interdisciplinary teams. Family Health Teams will also provide access to information technology tools for electronic medical records and decision support.

Research evidence supports the need to focus on chronic disease management and health promotion and disease prevention. Family Health Teams will provide this focus through the skills of the interdisciplinary teams and the additional tools and supports provided to family physicians.

Ontarians need one point of access to our complex health care system. Family Health Teams will provide the focus for primary health care navigation, particularly to those who need it most.