

Towards health and health care equity in Northern Ontario

A health equity strategy for Northern Ontario is officially in development.

The first meeting saw 70 people gather in Sudbury, Thunder Bay and via video conference on November 23rd, 2016.

Health Quality Ontario CEO Dr. Joshua Tepper began the day:

“Data consistently shows that there is tremendous variability of health access and outcomes across the province. Indigenous people, people living in rural and remote communities... often pay the highest cost.”

Health Quality Ontario’s Chief, Clinical Quality, Dr. Jeff Turnbull added:

“You cannot have a high-quality system for some – all need to benefit.”

He stressed that many opportunities now exist to make progress, propelled by acknowledgement of its importance by government and other health organizations. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, for example, has committed to supporting the development of this health equity strategy for Northern Ontario.

Those who participated in this meeting to inform the strategy included representatives from Francophone and Indigenous communities, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, the North East and North West Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), Northern public health units, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, researchers, community organizations, providers, and patients who offered their stories of lived experience in the North.

Louise Paquette is the CEO of the North East LHIN: “To talk about equity is music to the ears of Northerners.”

“We know that in the North, we have a number of health issues and risk factors that are different from in the South,” said Dr. Janet DeMille, medical officer of health for Thunder Bay.

This matter of context offered a critical foundation from which issues and promising solutions were discussed.

It was noted that people living in Ontario’s North West LHIN have the shortest average life expectancy of any LHIN in the province; and when compared to the rest of Ontario, those living in the North have a higher incidence of obesity, excessive alcohol consumption, and high blood pressure. Timely access to primary care was also highlighted among equitable issues.

Broader engagement with communities in the North is slated to begin in the new year, with the completed health equity strategy for Northern Ontario scheduled for release in Fall 2017.