



Co-RIG Project

# Integrating Urgent Mental Health and Addiction Services: Supporting vulnerable people in the primary care setting

**Project lead:** Mohammed Hussain, MD, CCFP, Family Physician, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Community Health Centre

**Project location:** Windsor, Ontario

## Summary

The Mental Health and Addictions Urgent Care Centre (MHAUCC)<sup>1</sup> provides in-person and virtual urgent mental health support in downtown Windsor. On-site social workers and addiction counsellors, supported by on-call urgent psychiatric care, provide a full spectrum of specialized and integrated care to the community. The MHAUCC operates as a drop-in clinic and is having a positive impact on connecting vulnerable patients to mental health and addiction services and resources, while reducing pressure on hospital emergency departments.

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## Faces of COVID-19

### Comprehensive care in a crisis

Chris, 21 years old, self-medicates to treat his major depressive disorder. He relies on walk-in clinics to address minor health related issues and has been unable to see his regular psychiatrist since the lockdown. Chris's condition has deteriorated to the point that he was hospitalized in the last month. When he was discharged from the hospital he continued to struggle and visited the MHAUCC. He was immediately seen by a social worker who provided help and assessed his need for further support. A primary care nurse registered him as a client with the health centre and booked him an appointment with a family physician on the same day. Chris was referred to psychiatric care and met virtually with a psychiatrist who provided further crisis stabilization and a new prescription. Chris's regular psychiatrist was also informed of the treatment plan. He returned a few days later to see an addiction worker who helped connect Chris to a community withdrawal management worker. Chris is feeling better able to manage his depression.

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## Project detail

Early in the pandemic, there was widespread concern that hospital emergency departments would be overrun with COVID-19 patients. Recognizing the impact on mental health and addictions caused by the pandemic, an alternative service and location were created in response to community need.

Working with Co-RIG funding Dr. Mohammed Hussain, an interprofessional group of family physicians, nurse practitioners, and teams from Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare and Canadian Mental Health Addiction (CMHA) Windsor-Essex County Branch responded to the growing crisis by establishing the MHAUCC in Windsor, Ontario.

The MHAUCC is in direct response to the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable people in their community. People with complex health conditions and pre-existing mental health issues were being significantly impacted by isolation and stress, and even more concerning was an increase in younger individuals in crisis for the first time with anxiety, substance abuse, and thoughts of suicide.

As a drop-in clinic, the MHAUCC provides accessible in-person and virtual mental health and addiction support in downtown Windsor. On-site crisis social workers and addiction counsellors, supported by on-call urgent psychiatric care, provide a full spectrum of specialized and integrated care to the community. The clinic is also reducing pressure on the local hospital emergency departments as an alternate location to receive services.

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## Impact

- **Improving access:** Providing walk-in clinical and mental health services was a lifeline for many clients, including many young people experiencing mental health issues for the first time. Many drop-in patients are now receiving ongoing care at the clinic.
- **Quality improvement:** The clinic's outpatient support with urgent mental health and addiction services increases use of treatment services and reduces use of emergency departments.
- **Enhancing family medicine:** The informal community of practice established as a result of the integrated care approach helps staff build competencies in mental health and addiction training.

## Results to date

- Twenty-four per cent of patients visiting the urgent care clinic did not have a family physician prior to their first visit.
- Thirty per cent of patients indicated that they would have visited an emergency room had the urgent care clinic not been available.
- Ninety-seven per cent of clients indicated that the program was helpful and 85 per cent of staff indicated that the clinic was meeting its goals after the first three months.

## Methodology

- Develop data collection tools.
- Recruit MHAUCC clients and implement data collection.
- Conduct MHAUCC staff focus groups and MHAUCC key informant interviews to evaluate whether the MHAUCC is achieving its goals effectively.
- Conduct data analysis and interpretation.
- Implement knowledge transfer activities.

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“A face-to-face visit helps with non-verbal cues that can be missed in virtual appointments. Natural interaction between care provider and patient allows us to gather more information, which is particularly important for psychiatric assessments. It helps our team make sure it provides the right support for our clients.”

– Dr. Mohammed Hussain, project lead

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<sup>1</sup>The Mental Health and Addictions Urgent Care Centre (MHAUCC) website. 2020. <https://windsorsex.cmha.ca/mhaucc/>. Accessed May 19, 2021.

### Project team

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### Partners

CMHA Community Health Centre  
Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare