

Evaluating benefits is an important component of the connecting South West Ontario (cSWO) Program that helps to support and demonstrate the realization of health system benefits through the adoption of electronic health records (EHRs). By pursuing the measurement of organizational value (improvements in the efficiency of care delivery such as time-savings and redirected resources) and clinical value (patients undergo fewer unnecessary tests, patients have improved access to care), patients ultimately benefit from higher quality, better informed clinical decision-making.

The cSWO Analysis and Research program uses a research-based approach to identify areas of clinical best practice that are affected by the use of EHRs, and works collaboratively with clinicians to understand the value of EHRs. This formative evaluation process informs change management and adoption, and enables clinicians to use EHRs more effectively. This research does not include the use of any personal health information.

This document is one in a series of case studies which describe the clinical value of EHRs in different clinical settings and contexts, particularly with respect to clinical best practices. The work of the cSWO Analysis and Research program is ongoing; depending on the circumstance, these cases occasionally raise questions for further investigation, and clinicians are invited to participate in analysis and research to continue to develop these answers.

## Value statement

The cSWO Regional Clinical Viewer, ClinicalConnect™, has provided the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Hamilton with immediate access to client diagnoses, enabling them to provide their clients with faster access to the appropriate support services.

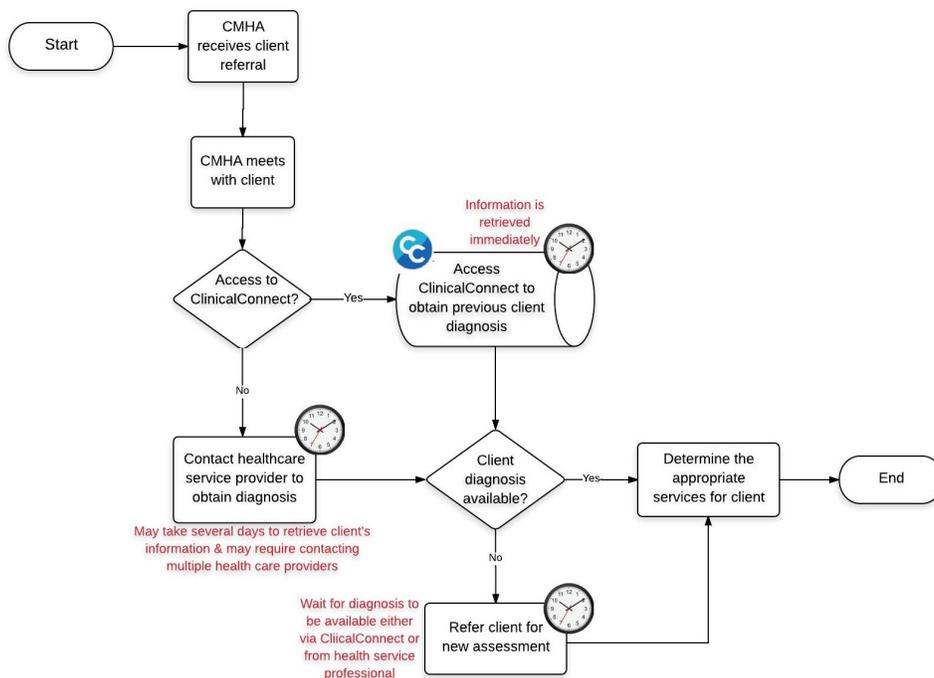
## Mental illness and mental health support services

In Canada, one in five people experience mental illness.<sup>1</sup> One Canadian social policy concern is the number of individuals with mental illness who are inappropriately involved in the criminal justice system. In the provincial correctional system, estimates of detained inmates who require clinical intervention for a mental disorder ranges from 15 to 20 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Of these, the majority are only charged with misdemeanor offenses, such as petty theft/shoplifting, marijuana possession, and trespassing.<sup>2</sup> After an individual has become involved with the criminal justice system, receiving mental health support services at the right time can provide extensive benefits, both to the individual, and to the community. Furthermore, the conditions in prisons such as poor diets, poor sanitation, noise, lack of privacy, and lack of family visits are detrimental to people who are mentally ill.<sup>3</sup> Based on this, diversion is an important voluntary alternative to prosecution “where a person may have their charges stayed if mental illness is a factor, if the charges are low-risk, and if supports and treatment can be provided in the community”<sup>4</sup>, moving them fully from criminal jurisdiction into that of healthcare.

The Canadian Mental Health Association in Hamilton, Ontario offers a voluntary diversion program to individuals with mental illness who have been charged with a minor offense. The ultimate goal of the diversion program is to stabilize participants’ mental illness, increase their capacity to live successfully in the community, prevent future crime, and reduce their likelihood of becoming acutely ill.<sup>2</sup> A diversion plan could include a psychiatric assessment and treatment, and short and long-term community supports such as housing, employment, and education.<sup>5</sup> Research from the Mental Health and Justice Calgary Diversion Project shows that diversion results in a reduction of inpatient hospital days and emergency room visits, and improvements in clinical symptoms and aspects of quality of life including occupational activities and social relationships<sup>2</sup>.

## ClinicalConnect use by CMHA Hamilton

ClinicalConnect has been instrumental in enabling CMHA Hamilton to deliver the appropriate health care services to their clients more efficiently. Before agreeing to receiving services, the potential client is made aware of their choice regarding the use, access and disclosure of their personal health care information to support the potential health care services to be provided. When the client first meets with CMHA Hamilton staff, his or her diagnosis must be confirmed in order to determine which services are most appropriate. Before ClinicalConnect, CMHA Hamilton staff spent considerable time tracking down the appropriate healthcare service providers in order to obtain the client’s diagnosis, a process that could take weeks depending on the circumstances. If the client could not remember who assessed them, or CMHA Hamilton could not find a previous diagnosis, they would have to refer the client for a new psychiatric assessment, and wait for the results, exhausting time and resources and potentially delaying treatment. Having immediate access to previous client diagnoses via ClinicalConnect enables staff to assign the appropriate health care services and begin treatment more quickly.



**Figure 1. ClinicalConnect Referral Intake process at CMHA Hamilton**

An example provided by CMHA Hamilton involved a new client presenting with a mood disorder. By accessing ClinicalConnect, CMHA Hamilton staff found that the client was already being treated for schizophrenia as an outpatient at another facility. This knowledge eliminated the need to refer the client for a duplicate assessment, and enabled the staff to work closely with the other facility to collectively develop the best treatment plan. Access to the client’s medical history via ClinicalConnect was essential in accurately assigning the client to the appropriate services. Without ClinicalConnect, the client may have been delayed in receiving the most appropriate health care services.

## Testimonial

“I work within a community mental health agency in Hamilton and access to medical records is essential in both the intake process and the ongoing care of registered clients. ClinicalConnect has allowed me the opportunity to access records in a timely and efficient manner and it allows me the opportunity to access medical records from other neighboring jurisdictions. This type of access to medical records has been particularly useful when assisting individuals who are new to Hamilton or who live a transient lifestyle as well as individuals who, due to their mental health issues, are not able to recall details about past medical care. Due to the use of ClinicalConnect some of the barriers that these individuals experience in accessing quality care are reduced. Thank you ClinicalConnect!”

Health Service Provider, CMHA Hamilton

## Questions

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## Sources

<sup>1</sup>Smetanin, P., Stiff, D., Briante, C., Adair, C., Ahmad, S. & Khan, M. (2011). *The life and economic impact of major mental illnesses in Canada: 2011 to 2041*. RiskAnalytics, on behalf of the Mental Health Commission of Canada

<sup>2</sup>South West LHIN. (2011). Adult therapeutic court/court support & diversion: A review of health services within the court model. Retrieved from <http://www.fasdontario.ca/cms/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Court-Eval-Project.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration, Committee on Law and Justice, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council, Board on Health of Select Populations, Institute of Medicine. (2013). *Health and Incarceration: A workshop summary*. USA: National Academies Press

<sup>4</sup>Center for Addiction and Mental Health. (2013). *Mental Health and Criminal Justice Policy Framework*. Retrieved from [https://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/about\\_camh/influencing\\_public\\_policy/Documents/MH\\_Criminal\\_Justice\\_Policy\\_Framework.pdf](https://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/about_camh/influencing_public_policy/Documents/MH_Criminal_Justice_Policy_Framework.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>Canadian Mental Health Association Hamilton. (2016). Mental Health Court Support Services. Retrieved from <https://cmhahamilton.ca/programs-services/mental-health-court-support-services/>

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