

Access to PRIMARY CARE

DEALING WITH MENTAL HEALTH
OR SUBSTANCE USE CONCERNS?

FIND IT HARD TO GET THE
HEALTH CARE YOU NEED?

HERE ARE SOME TIPS THAT MAY HELP...

Your family doctor is usually your first point of contact with the health care system, so it is important to ask and share as much information as possible with them. Here are some suggestions for questions or concerns you might want to talk to your doctor about.

- **Appointment waiting times:** Sometimes you have to wait in waiting rooms for a long time before you can see your family doctor (or other health care provider). This can be difficult for anyone, but particularly if you are dealing with a mental health and/or substance use issue. You may want to ask in advance how long you are likely to have to wait. You might also choose to share with your provider or reception staff any concerns you have about this (e.g., if waiting in a crowded waiting area makes you feel very anxious) so that they can work together with you to come up with a solution.
- **Appointment scheduling:** Early morning appointments can be difficult or impossible for some people who are living with mental health and/or substance use issues. If this applies to you, when you are booking appointments with your doctor, you may want to ask for an afternoon appointment. If you are comfortable, it can be helpful to explain to your doctor why you are making this request.
- **After hours care:** Some family physicians are associated with specific after hours services. These services let you speak to or see a family doctor outside of regular business hours. Check with your family doctor if they are a part of a team like this. If not, ask if they can recommend clinics should you need non-emergency care after hours.
- **Consenting to treatment:** Whenever your family doctor (or any other health care professional) wants to start you on a new treatment, they are required to get your informed consent. This means that you need to be given all the relevant information and be able to ask any questions to help you decide whether the treatment is right for you. This includes a full discussion of what the treatment is intended to do, any potential side-effects and how likely they are to happen, as well as other treatment options available to you. You have a right to ask questions and take as much time as you need to make an informed decision. This may mean booking a follow-up appointment to tell your doctor your final decision, after you have had a chance to think it over and talk about it with other people if you want to.
- **Generic medications:** Many medications are available in a 'generic' format, which is usually less expensive than the brand name drug. You can ask your doctor (or your pharmacist) if any prescriptions you are on are available in a generic format.
- **Referrals for other health care:** If your doctor is making a referral for you to another service or specialist, it's a good idea to ask how long it is likely to take before you get an appointment. If you haven't heard from the service/specialist within the time frame your family doctor tells you, ask her/him to follow-up. You also have the right to ask for a different referral if you do not like the way you were treated by the first referral.
- **Reception staff:** Your family doctor usually hires her/his reception staff and so is responsible for their behaviour. If you have any issues or concerns about interactions with reception or front-desk staff, it is appropriate to speak to your family doctor about this.

OTHER USEFUL TIPS

Accessing medications:

When it comes to receiving free or cheaper medications talk to your health care provider to see if you qualify for Trillium Drug Benefits or other drug benefits, if you access Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

Strategies for walk-in clinics:

- Try to be consistent! When selecting a walk-in clinic find one that you're comfortable with and try to keep going back to it. This way, they will already have your file on hand. The same goes for pharmacies. Sticking to the same walk-in clinic or pharmacy is one way to avoid hassle.
- You should know that there may be wait-times at walk-in clinics. You can try phoning ahead to find out what time of day is best.

If you feel you have been treated unfairly or unjustly by your health care provider, you have the right to report any examples of poor practice or discriminatory attitudes:

- **The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act** (2005), which includes people living with mental health and/or substance use issues, states that it is discriminatory to deny services to this group. Hospitals and other health care organizations are listed as organizations that must follow the Act.

The following organizations investigate complaints against health care providers:

- **The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario**

If you would like to talk to someone about the care or conduct of a physician or about the complaints process, please contact their Public Advisory department.

**Phone: 416-967-2603
or 1-800-268-7096 ext. 603
E-mail: ir@cpso.on.ca**

- **Ombudsman Ontario**

**Phone: 1-800-263-1830 (Complaints Line)
TTY (Teletypewriter): 1-866-411-4211
E-mail: info@ombudsman.on.ca**

- **Ontario Human Rights Legal Support Centre**

If you feel that you have been discriminated against you can always contact the Ontario Human Rights Legal Support Centre for advice. You can access their website at www.hrlsc.on.ca. They offer support in multiple languages. You can also call them at.

**Phone: 416-597-4900
Toll Free: 1-866-625-5179
TTY: 416-597-4903
TTY Toll Free: 1-866 612-8627**

- **The Empowerment Council**

An advocacy-run organization that you can connect with. The Empowerment Council is a voice for clients/survivors and ex-clients of mental health and addiction services, primarily of CAMH. They conduct system-wide advocacy on behalf of clients and ex-clients. More information is available on their website at www.empowermentcouncil.ca

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE
WWW.CAMH.CA/PRIMARY-CARE-STUDY**

camh
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

**Access to
PRIMARY
CARE**

Access to Primary Care for people living with mental health and substance use issues: a qualitative study is funded by the Development and Dissemination Fund of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Partners on this project include the Empowerment Council, Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre, Sherbourne Health Centre, Somerset West Community Health Centre, Scadding Court Community Centre, The Ontario College of Family Physicians, Women's College Hospital and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Access to Primary Care for people living with mental health and substance use issues: A qualitative study