

# Practice #13: A Public Health Nurse in a Community Service Centre: Ensuring Seniors' Referral to Resources (Ontario)

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## ABOUT THE FACT SHEET

This fact sheet is part of the *Directory of Innovative Practices in Health and Social Services in Official Language Minority Contexts* (available at: [https://www.grefops.ca/directory\\_innovative\\_practices.html](https://www.grefops.ca/directory_innovative_practices.html))

The *Directory of Innovative Practices* (formerly the Handbook of Innovative Practices on the Integration of Official Language Minority Health and Social Services) is a complementary resource to the *Organizational and Community Resources Self-Assessment Tool for Active Offer and Social and Health Services Continuity*<sup>1</sup>. It presents initiatives that have been put in place, most often at the local level, that respond to a community need and are perceived as innovative by the various actors involved in their implementation. The practices were identified, analyzed and classified according to an evaluation framework developed by the Health Council of Canada. This framework allowed us to distinguish between emerging practices, promising practices and leading practices. Some of these practices were suggested by the *Société Santé en français* and the provincial, territorial and regional French-language health networks, or other partners.

The reader is referred to the [Introduction and Method](#) document for information about the authors and collaborators, background on the project, a description of the methodology used to create the fact sheets, definitions of the following concepts:

- Leading Practice, Promising Practice, Emerging Practice
- Quality of evidence, impact, applicability, transferability
- Service coordination, service integration, liaison
- Active offer

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<sup>1</sup> The self-assessment Tool is available in English and French and can be accessed at the following Web address:  
[https://www.grefops.ca/selfassessment\\_tool.html](https://www.grefops.ca/selfassessment_tool.html) (English version)  
[https://www.grefops.ca/outil\\_autoevaluation.html](https://www.grefops.ca/outil_autoevaluation.html) (French version)

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### This practice contributes to improving:

- Interinstitutional coordination, liaison and integration mechanisms.

### The organization implementing this practice:

Ottawa Public Health and the Vanier Community Service Centre, Ottawa.

The information contained in this fact sheet was mainly acquired from a telephone interview conducted on August 3, 2017, with Barra Thiom, Community Developer. It was complemented by documentary research, and these sources are cited as references. The fact sheet was revised in March 2021 in collaboration with Mr. Thiom.

### Background

The Vanier Community Service Centre (CSC Vanier)<sup>2</sup> is located near two subsidized facilities for low-income autonomous seniors in the City of Ottawa's Vanier neighbourhood (see practice #12). Both residences house a majority of Francophone seniors. This population quickly became a target for CSC Vanier service providers. A partnership was launched with Ottawa Community Housing (OCH), owners of the facilities<sup>3</sup> and the resident committees of both facilities. Since they are not long-term-care institutions, the facilities do not offer healthcare services. This factor, combined with the considerable isolation among residents that was observed by community centre staff, confirmed the need for an intervention specifically designed for this population.<sup>4</sup>

Coincidentally, Ottawa Public Health implemented a program where community nurses worked full time in community service centres across Ottawa. This physical proximity contributed to the ability to combine emerging findings in the community (isolation and lack of services) to the expertise of a nurse, leading to the design of a structure that ensured the delivery of services to residents.<sup>5</sup> As a result, through Lunch and Chats (a practice developed in collaboration with the public health nurse), it was possible to reach residents in their living environment where they could share a meal in a welcoming atmosphere (see practice # 12), to better identify their health and social services needs.

### Objectives

This program, funded by Ottawa Public Health, enabled the deployment of a nurse at CSC Vanier. She was responsible for identifying seniors' needs and referring them to the services they required.

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<sup>2</sup> Vanier community Service Center, accessed on July 20, 2017. Retrieved from : <http://www.cscvanier.com/en>

<sup>3</sup> Ottawa Community Housing. Accessed on July 20, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://ochfoundation.ca/partners/ottawa-community-housing/>

<sup>4</sup> Laniel, M-E. (2012). *Enabling Occupation among Isolated Seniors*. Final Report Prepared for the Vanier Community Service Center (VCSC).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

## Features of the Practice

Along with CSC Vanier's psychosocial service providers (see practice #12), the public health nurse used Lunch and Chats to reach out to residents in their living environment and to share a meal in a warm atmosphere, while addressing any concerns seniors may have about their health. Consequently, the nurse could assist in managing medications and in referring individuals to relevant health services according to the care they needed, with a view to reducing unnecessary visits to hospital emergency services.

Unfortunately, since 2017, the nurses have been redeployed and are no longer physically present in the community service centers. However, the resources that had been developed in collaboration with the nurse remain very useful.

Despite the absence of the nurse, the Vanier CSC has mobilized and is working to create collaborations with other health centers and organizations that can come and make presentations on themes that particularly affect seniors, and according to their needs. At the beginning of the year, the Vanier CSC proposes a survey to seniors in the two residences to better target the themes that are of interest to them. For example, the police department offered a workshop to seniors on fraud and how to protect themselves, and the fire department offers sessions on safety and procedures to follow in the event of a fire, particularly for a population with reduced mobility. The Vanier CSC also collaborates with the Centre Pauline Charron which organizes activities for seniors. The Centre Pauline Charron provides financial support to the Vanier CSC to allow residents to participate in activities such as the dinner theater.

## Challenges

The main challenge for community resource centres who wished to carry on the practice in their neighbourhood was funding the position of a community health nurse. In fact, following the redeployment, community service centres did not have the financial means to pay for the nurse's services which were previously fully funded by Ottawa Public Health.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Public Health once again reached out to the community with additional resources. Professionals from Ottawa Public Health's Community Development Team accompanied Vanier CSC workers in a door-to-door approach to residents to distribute masks and explain health instructions. The Vanier CSC is now part of a consultation table with Public Health to implement outreach work in the community in relation to the COVID-19 response. The Vanier CSC hopes that this return of Public Health to the community will continue even after the pandemic.

## Analysis<sup>6</sup>

### Why is this practice considered innovative?

Needs were identified by Ottawa Public Health at the time of program implementation and relied on a solid evidence base. Community stakeholders also recognize the importance of having a nurse assigned to the community and the innovative nature of the practice.

### Emerging, Promising or Leading: An Emerging Practice

**Quality of evidence:** This initiative has not been formally evaluated. However, recipients, providers, and partners found it efficient and relevant.

**Impact:** Community actors recognize that this practice has positive impacts on healthcare system performance by breaking down isolation, informing and supporting seniors to enhance their quality of life. The nurse's role enabled the referral of seniors so they could benefit from individualized follow-up at the Vanier Community Service Centre, or referral to necessary services; thanks to appropriate resource utilization, these interventions fostered better monitoring of seniors' health status.

**Applicability:** The practice is no longer implemented in community service centres. However, the Primary Care Outreach to Seniors program was set up in community health centres.

**Transferability:** Transferability was somewhat demonstrated since public health nurses were deployed in 13 community health centres.

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<sup>6</sup> This analysis is based on criteria defined in the *Innovative Practices Evaluation Framework* designed by the Health Council of Canada. Retrieved from: [https://healthcouncilcanada.ca/files/IP\\_Framework\\_Eng\\_final\\_1.pdf](https://healthcouncilcanada.ca/files/IP_Framework_Eng_final_1.pdf) also outlined in the Introduction and method document.