

GHHN Playbook WOMEN'S HEALTH DAYS

Greater
Hamilton
Health
Network



*Building community
health together.*



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Brining it All
Together

Foreward



Acknowledgement

The GHHN and the YWCA Hamilton proudly partnered with McMaster University, Sustain 2SS3-- Advocating for Sustainability class during the Winter 2022 semester and worked with an incredible group of dedicated students who developed the Women's Health Days Playbook.

This project was possible due to the leadership of Violetta Nikolskaya, Senior Analyst, Programs and Advocacy, at the YWCA Hamilton. Violetta served as the Community Project Champion for the semester and worked with the students to oversee the development of the playbook. Thank you Violetta for your dedication to helping women and gender diverse persons, leading by example and for your community leadership to help transform services and systems.

A special thank you to the students for their research, leadership, passion and dedication to developing a comprehensive tool that will support others interested in offering low barrier healthcare services to women and gender diverse persons experiencing homelessness.

Students, we wish you all the best in your future endeavours and are grateful for your contribution to this important work:

- Gokberk Yilmaz
- Manahil Quamar
- Mikayla Robinson
- Molly Cameron
- Tamara Rahal





OUR MESSAGE TO OUR PARTNERS AND THE COMMUNITY

Who we are

The Greater Hamilton Health Network is one of 50 Ontario Health Teams across the province with a purpose of transforming healthcare in partnership with patients, families, care partners, primary care, local organizations and the community.

The Greater Hamilton Health Network is a collaboration of local patients, families, care partners, and health and human service partners from across Hamilton, Haldimand and Niagara Northwest. The GHHN includes representation from more than 30 organizations, reflecting primary care, home care, hospitals, community agencies, long-term care, mental health, Indigenous health, post-secondary education, and the City of Hamilton, Haldimand County and Haldimand Health.

As a dedicated group of professionals, organizations and people with lived experience, we are working to co-design a patient centred health system grounded in engagement, health equity and the local needs of the communities we serve.

We look forward to building community health together.

Directors Update

Thank you for taking the time to read through this collaborative playbook. The partners around the GHHN have joined together to focus on efforts that can bring health, social and recreational care to some of our most vulnerable in the city.

We know homelessness and inadequate housing can have detrimental health impacts; and the solutions to fight homelessness and housing are multi-faceted and at times take longer than anyone wants.

We can act now to help these women. We can come together to provide integrated opportunities to help, to offer support, to have valuable one on one conversations, and to connect them to other needed supports in the community.

Each day that passes, women who are homeless become more at risk. This is a call to action to support these women, we encourage all to use these learnings in their own communities. Thank you.



Melissa McCallum
Director

Welcome

“

providing continued support to women, trans, and gender diverse persons experiencing homelessness in Hamilton

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Megan Lynch
Manager of
Priority Populations

Studies from Statistics Canada show that the number of people experiencing homelessness in Ontario is increasing over the years and over 200 of them each week are accessing the Emergency Department of hospitals to receive healthcare. In the same study, it is shown that on average, of all emergency department patients, a higher percentage of females experiencing homelessness are visiting the ER than males.

Another important factor to consider in running a Women's Health Day is the experiences of trans individuals in receiving healthcare. One of the main issues here is that many trans individuals do not feel comfortable being "out" in healthcare settings. Around 22.8% of trans people feel uncomfortable being out in walk-in clinics, 18.7% in emergency rooms, and 17.7% in urgent care. 33.2% of transgender respondents to this same survey also felt unsatisfied with the knowledge that healthcare workers held on the health of Two-Spirit and LGBTIQ+ individuals. Overall, this source found that the needs of trans and gender diverse peoples are not being adequately met by traditional healthcare services.

A Call to Action

With the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency rooms have become more crowded than ever, and people experiencing homelessness make up a significant portion of the people accessing care this way. This not only means that ER's are experiencing longer wait times, but clearly people experiencing homelessness are not receiving the care that they need elsewhere. If we can reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness who are going to the ER for medical care, the hospitals can improve their efficiency and in general, all people will be healthier.

Introducing... Women's Health Days!

The GHHN recognizes that women experiencing homelessness often do not access the healthcare system in the traditional ways due to past experiences, trauma, stigma and need for rapport with the service provider. Women's Health Days are an integrated approach bringing healthcare directly to women and gender diverse individuals experiencing homelessness by meeting them where they are at. This low barrier service is offered in an organization participants are currently using, and works with the host organization and committee members to understand how best to support and provide care and current needs.

The Greater Hamilton Health Network in partnership with the YWCA Hamilton, Mission Services (2 past host organizations) and many GHHN partners, community leaders and healthcare providers have worked together to hold three of these events within the last year with great success. Feedback from women and gender diverse people who have attended these health days shows that they are receiving the care that they need, and that they would like these events to be offered at least once per season. We strongly recommend making this a two-day event based on feedback to allow participants to familiarize themselves with the event, spread the word and return the next day for services.

This playbook is meant to act as a guide for organizations to plan and execute a Women's Health Day in their community. Throughout, we will be directing planning towards an event meant to serve women and gender diverse people, but we have seen strong interest in similar events for other priority groups such as men, so we will include considerations for events not directed to women and gender diverse people specifically.



This playbook includes considerations related to: overall planning, location, logistics, advertising/promotion and donations. Accessibility considerations have been included within each section.

STEP 1: LOCATION

Once you have decided to host a WHD, the first thing to consider which organization will be the host agency, with the Ontario Health Team or Lead Agency taking the lead for planning and coordination.

Throughout this Playbook, we will be referring to the organization where the health day will be physically located as the hosting organization.

The hosting organization is responsible for working with the Ontario Health Team/ Lead Agency to plan and prepare for the Women's Health Day Event. This playbook will speak to the various roles and the need for significant collaboration between the lead, hosting, and health care providers throughout the planning process.

Hosting and Lead

- How are the hosting and lead organizations communicating with each other?
- What is the hosting organization responsible for?
- What is the lead organization responsible for?
- It is important to ensure that everyone knows who is doing what to avoid missed aspects of planning.

External Location

- What is the address of the event?
- Consider hosting the event at a location that women tend to go to often. This will make them more comfortable with attending the event, and also assist in raising awareness that the event is happening.
- Are you located in a downtown or rural area?





Accessibility

- How will people get to the event? Are you providing bus tickets or taxi vouchers? A consideration for any location is to understand how women can get to the event and it may be more worthwhile to host an event where there are critical other services homeless women are already accessing.
- Is the location easy to find and directions/signage provided to direct people to the entrance?

Internal Location

- Get access to the floorplan of the event space
- If possible, do a site visit and make detailed notes of the spaces available. This will help you later on when deciding where to set up services.
- Is the event being held indoors, outdoors, or both?
- What are your capacity limits?

Consider fire code limits (absolute maximum), your comfortable capacity, and allowable capacity due to pandemic/outbreak related restrictions.

Accessibility

- Is the event space accessible? If not, has this been communicated in promotions?
- Where are ramps, elevators, and bathrooms located?
- How can you accommodate people with vision impairments, hearing loss, or other disabilities?

Expect the Unexpected

- What is the bare minimum space that you need?
- Do you have access to a back-up location? Could you host the event outside if needed?
- Create a map or list of all locations and amenities that are available to you on the day of the event Are you using all spaces or can one be a back-up?
- Things to think about from past experience: Do you have access to a shower if needed? Do you have an outdoor tent which a service could be offered in?
- Is there an emergency button in the bathrooms?

Other Priority Groups

In general, the location considerations will be similar for all priority groups. A couple of examples to consider for your community specifically:

- Do you need a specific prayer room?
- Ceremony spaces for Indigenous partners and people accessing the event
- Are the bathrooms gender inclusive? Can signage be altered on the day of the event to include all-gender washrooms?



STEP 2: PEOPLE

People are what make this event happen. Ensuring you have the right people is crucial to running a successful Women's Health Day.



Internal Staff

- Have all event location staff been made aware of this event? In particular, custodial staff and receptionists.
- If there are other programs being offered at the same time, have they all been notified about the event and how their programming may be impacted?

Service Providers

Choosing the right service providers is integral when planning these events. If possible, recruit clinicians and support staff who is already engaged with the homeless community in your area and who have built up some of those foundational relationship with homeless community members. In general, your service providers should:

- Be engaged in the community you are serving
- Instil a sense of trust with the women and gender diverse people who will attend the event
- Be open-minded and progressive
- Ideally be able to work with very little equipment/additional support and be flexible.
- Typically, in these events, it is difficult to get access to things such as proper beds with stirrups and most of the events do not have formal clinical space
- What services can the service providers offer in the space that you have?
- A successful women's health day will include clinical and non clinical services.
- Examples of clinical related services offered in the past: PAP smears, birth control and menstrual health consultation, STI/UTI testing, vaccinations, foot care clinic, sexual assault consultation (safe and healthy relationships), wound care, naloxone kit training, mental health and additions support, HIV testing, etc.
- Examples of non-health-related services: haircuts, yoga, mindfulness, colouring/crafts, art therapy, self-defense, pedicures/manicures, clothing drives, etc.
- Who is responsible for bringing test samples to the lab after the event is done?
- What space/equipment does each service provider need?

To organize your service planning, create a chart similar to the one below:

Name of Service	What service is provided?	What space do they require?	What equipment do they need?	Can they work in an emergency if needed?

Communication between organizers and service providers is key. Ensure there are open lines of communication leading up to the event between the hosting organization, housing organization, and the service provider.

- Service provider: walk through step-by-step every part of the service you are providing and create a list of equipment that you will need (include pens, paper, printer, computer, bed, etc.) - they never need nothing!
- Indicate on the list which items you (the service provider) can bring to the event
- Send back to the housing and hosting organizations to go through the list until all items needed are accounted for
- Send a reminder of which items the service provider is supposed to bring about a week before the event (make sure that you receive confirmation that they will be bringing the items they have committed to)

Volunteers and Peer Support

- Community volunteers and peer support workers are imperative to the success of the event, especially when peers have developed trusted relationships with the women potentially attending the event. Decide on the number of volunteers in relation to clinical and support staff (do not want to overwhelm the space with too many people)
- How are you finding/reaching out to volunteers? Are there any local universities/colleges with clubs who would be interested in participating?
- What training/orientation do volunteers need prior to the event? Specific time to show up to find out their role for the day?
- Who is in charge of volunteers and making sure they know what to do?
- What local organizations already offer peer support you could tap into?

Accessibility

- Consider accessibility to ramps, elevators, walkers and wheelchairs for all staff and participants
- Does each event staff know where the closest bathroom is?
- What language translators/interpreters do you have? Examples include an ASL interpreter, French translator, etc.
- When deciding which spaces to have each service in, consider placing sensitive/emotional services close to exits so someone can leave quickly if needed



What to learn more?

Visit our Women's Health Days [Blog](#).

Expect the Unexpected

- Do you have any back-up service providers if someone cannot make it last minute?
- What emergency personnel do you have on site? Planning for unexpected crisis' is imperative, for example: a mental health crisis, women in distress
- Examples: security, social worker, paramedic, designated first aid person
- Develop a safety plan in case of emergency

Other Priority Groups

- Which services are needed by the priority group which you are serving?
- Based on specific needs of your community, you can tailor services such as:
- Specific care supports for trans members of the community accessing the event
- Indigenous health and well-being
- Language and interpretation needs
- Those that are actively using drugs
- Racialize populations
- Elderly population
- Those with disabilities

STEP 3: Materials

Make sure you have staple items on hand including pens, pencils, extension cords, paper, wifi, etc. Who is in charge of getting all of these materials and distributing them on the event day?

**Service-Specific Equipment**

- What materials/equipment does each service provider need?
- Refer back to the chart you made in the service provider section!
- Who is responsible for bringing each of these materials? Refer back to your lists and communications with service providers in the service provider section. Examples: beds, lighting, fridge for test samples, biohazard bins, etc.
- What medical supplies are needed for specific procedures? These should ideally be brought by service providers to ensure they meet the standards required for care.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Epidemic/Pandemic-Specific PPE (COVID, SARS, MRSA, H1N1, etc.)
- What are the current government/public health regulating body regulations in place at the time of the event?
- What are the hosting organization's specific PPE requirements? Who is providing PPE? Example: masking requirements

- Hand sanitizer stations set up throughout the event, especially in areas where food is being served
- Disinfecting wipes for high-touch surfaces, frequent cleaning of bathrooms, etc.. Is this done by the event staff of hosting organization custodial staff?

Service-Specific PPE

- Are service providers expected to bring their own service-related PPE? Refer back to the list communicated in the service provider's section
- If the hosting/housing organization is responsible for providing PPE, where are you getting it from, and does it meet standards for medical procedures?

Accessibility

- If someone cannot wear a face mask for any reason, are there other options available?
- How do you accommodate people who are hard of hearing if everyone is wearing masks?

Expect the Unexpected

- Do you have backup equipment if someone does not bring what they need?
- Where can you get basic materials from last minute if needed?
- Have you communicated with service providers about what they need to bring in the days leading up to the event?



STEP 4: DONATIONS

Giving back to more vulnerable populations has been key in planning these events. Women of all ages have been thankful to receive a variety of donations when accessing these days.



Giveaways

- What monetary items are you giving out? Example: gift cards to grocery stores, dollar stores, etc.
- How are you getting these? Do you have a corporate sponsorship and gift cards are being donated?
- What physical items are you giving out? Example: clothing, feminine hygiene products, toiletries, purses/bags, etc.
- Where are you getting these items from?
- Find out from organizations which items they are bringing?
- Work with local community organizations to access donations they already collect for women

Talking to Sponsors

- If you or another organization already have affiliations with a corporate sponsor, reach out to them first. You can also look into finding corporate sponsors by finding local businesses with CSR budgets.
- Reach out to businesses about what you need
- Refer to the following link for some sponsorship letter templates

Food

- What food are you providing at the event?
- Who is providing the food? Are you making it in a kitchen at the hosting organization? Is there a local business sponsoring the food?
- How is the food being stored for long periods of time? Is there a fridge that cold items can be stored in?
- Think about having enough food to feed the women at the event and some for them to take away as they leave.

Accessibility

- Consider food allergies and options for those who are older, of different cultural backgrounds, etc
- Example: allergies, foods which are easy to chew if people are lacking teeth/dentures, halal options, vegetarian, etc.
- Attain clothing in a variety of sizes

STEP 5: ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION

Promotion and advertising of the event is a key component and relies on all partners to get the word out across various channels.



Communication Channels

- What communication channels do women and gender diverse people in your community use most?
- How do these communication channels differ for different demographics? (Example: age, religion, etc.)
- How early can you begin advertising?
- Do you have partner organizations or know of organizations that will extend your outreach to the community?
- Is social media prominent among the women and gender diverse people you are trying to reach? Is there a better way to reach them? Examples: word of mouth posters in public places such as bathroom stalls in public washrooms, business cards distributed by community organizations, etc.
- Advertise at the community level and include a bus ticket to make it more accessible for women to attend.

Information to be Shared

- What information is crucial for people attending the event to know? Examples: date, time, location
- What information would be nice for people to know about? Example: services offered
- What information is important to keep private until the event? Example: names of service providers who will be there

Accessibility

- Are means of communication accessible for people with disabilities such as vision loss?

Expect the Unexpected

- What will you do if media outlets show up? Having a press release or statement prepared is ideal.
- How will you handle unwanted attention from police, well-intentioned but misdirected groups (such as religious organizations looking to set up a booth), men, etc.?

Additional Things to Consider

- When volunteers are coming into help, women and gender diverse people may share things that are difficult to hear. Make sure that all volunteers know who they can go to for support and consider providing some mental health training prior to the event.
- How will you handle a situation where someone comes to the event who does not meet the demographic you are serving but needs the services you are providing?
- Do you have a way to collect contact information for people to receive test results? For example: if they have a phone number/email address, collect this. If not, do they have somewhere that they stay most often that can be recorded?

Bringing it all Together

The day of the event is where the planning, organizing and volunteers come together to provide engaging, low barrier integrated services for women.

Here is a walkthrough of one of the events that has been run in Hamilton in the past from the perspective of both the women and gender diverse people attending, and from a planner's viewpoint. Events will be different based on the space you have available, which services you're offering, and the priority group you are serving.

Event Set-Up

Service providers are eager to set up their stations and may arrive much earlier than expected. Be prepared to direct people in the hour or two before the event starts and know where each service is supposed to be set-up.

Consider having service providers come into the building in small groups in the days leading up to the event to get situated and ease stress on the day-of. This also gives service providers a chance to network and get to know what else is being offered at the event so they can refer women and gender diverse people to other stations at the event.

Be prepared to change up the locations of each station depending on event flow!

Friendly Greeting

Outside the event location, we had event staff handing out hot chocolate to people experiencing homelessness (regardless of if they're part of the priority group you are serving). A friendly greeting or introduction gives the opportunity to share with women and gender diverse people what you are offering that day and encourage them to seek care from some of the services in a stress-free environment. Women and gender diverse people experiencing homelessness may have some bad past experiences with healthcare so it is important to ensure they know it is a welcoming and safe place for them to access services.

Check-In

The first station for people to go to was a check-in station where they made name tags, created pins with their pronouns on them (or anything else they wanted), and received a lanyard to attach their name tag. The free donations and gift cards provided at the event are a big draw that brings people in, so to encourage them to access services we used a passport system. On the back of their name tags, we had printed out all of the services being offered so when they went to each service they would get a stamp or sticker on the service they visited. At the end of the event, they could then trade in this passport for their free items!

Visiting Services

Next, they could move on to visiting the service booths that are set up. Everyone moves around at their own pace, some staying for a long time at some stations or just sitting in the lobby and relaxing, or some will go to a couple specific stations if they have existing concerns. Ensure that you have some staff floating around to help direct event attendees to stations (especially if the event location is a confusing layout). Make sure that all event staff are easily identifiable; we had each event staff wearing an “Ask Me” pin!

Food

We had food sitting out with an event staff nearby to distribute food and reduce the potential for COVID spread. Some people grabbed food as they were leaving, others got some to eat while they went around to see the other stations.

Donations

We had the donations table set up near the entrance/exit which helped to intrigue women and gender diverse people to come into the event and gave them a chance to get what they need before leaving without having to carry it around for the whole event. This is where people showed their passport with stickers from the different services they accessed.

We had a large clothing donation area set up with tables for clothing and shoes organized by size. Helping out in the clothing donation area, we had women and gender diverse people with lived experience who may have experienced homelessness in the past or accessed Women’s Health Days before. These women and gender diverse people helped people to pick out the clothing they wanted and just provided a friendly face to chat with. These women and gender diverse individuals with lived experience were paid \$20/hour to help at the event.



Button Making Activity

Feedback Survey

- As people were leaving, we had some chart paper taped to the walls with feedback surveys for them to fill out. There were stickers next to the chart paper so people could put a sticker on the paper to indicate their opinion/answer to each question.
- Some example questions are:
- Where do you go to see a doctor/get healthcare? Call 911/ambulance, urgent care, hospital, walk-in clinic, Shelter Health Network, family doctor, other
- What makes seeing a doctor hard/difficult? Don't know where to go, long wait times, too sick to go, don't know what to say, fear of judgement/disrespect, feel ignored by them, scared, other
- Did we have what you needed? Yes, no I needed: eye care, foot care, help getting a family doctor, safe substance use support, reproductive health care, different immunizations, mental health support, treatment for STIs, other
- Should we do this again? Yes: every month, once per season (4 times a year), once a year, no

End of Event

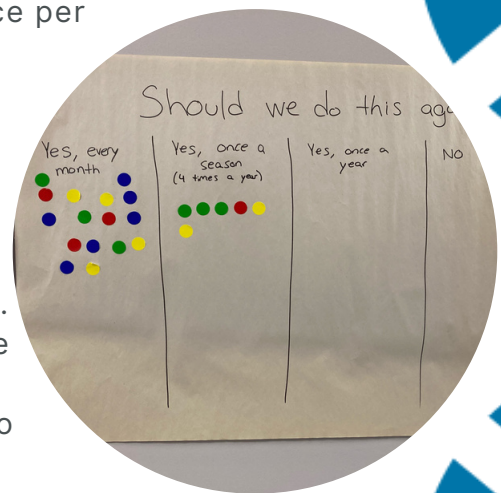
At the end of the event, service providers can clean up their own space and ensure that they bring everything that they brought back with them. Whoever is designated to bring test samples to the lab should do this. Planners can take down tables and ensure everything is back where it was prior to the event.

Note: if the event is going to run for two days (strongly recommended!), some of the set-up can be left overnight as long as it is approved by the hosting organization.

Make sure to send thank you emails/notes to service providers, sponsors, and anyone else who helped to make the event happen, and also take time to congratulate yourselves for making a huge impact in your community!

After the Event

Reflect on what went well, what could have been improved, get feedback from people involved in the event, and think about planning another event! By having these Women's Health Days often and providing preventative healthcare, you can improve the overall health of women and gender diverse people experiencing homelessness by meeting them where they are at.



Thank you

On behalf of the Greater Hamilton Health Network, our partners, contributors and participants of Women's Health Days, thank you for considering a new way of offering care to women, trans, and gender diverse individuals experiencing homelessness.

We are confident that this unique service model can be replicated and adapted to meet the needs of various populations in communities around the world.

Let us continue to come together from multiple sectors and find new ways to meet people where they are at in life and better support their health and wellbeing needs.

We thank you for your continued support in Building Community Health Together.

Melissa McCallum

GHHN Executive Director

Stay Connected

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