

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES?

Community Health Centres (CHCs) across Ontario are non-profit organizations that are focused on preventing avoidable illnesses for a targeted geographical population.

They play an essential role in improving the health outcomes of Canadians. This is because they effectively connect community and organizational services to people who need them the most. CHCs serve a diverse client population including insured, non-insured (with no OHIP), refugees, etc., who otherwise are unable to access care and services.



MY TEAM AND I AT THE NORTH WESTERN TORONTO ONTARIO HEALTH TEAMS (OHTS) MEETING IN TORONTO

BLACK CREEK COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

Located in North West Toronto, Black Creek Community Health Centre (BCCHC) serves a community which for decades, has earned a reputation for its crime and violence. The social challenges afflicting this community leaves its residents unwilling or unable to access social programs and health care services to maintain their health and well-being.

BCCHCs mission is to achieve health equity by eliminating barriers to accessing care and services for those in their community who are most at risk, including youth, new immigrants, low income, refugees, and non-insured. The centre works with its clients, and community agencies, to design and organize programs and services that would address unique—and often complex—health care needs of its client population.

MY PROJECTS

At BCCHC I worked with the Quality Improvement (QIP) Team on a Quality improvement initiative to improve demographic data quality by identifying the underlying causes of missing data and implementing evidence-informed strategies to ensure continuing demographic data collection at the centre.

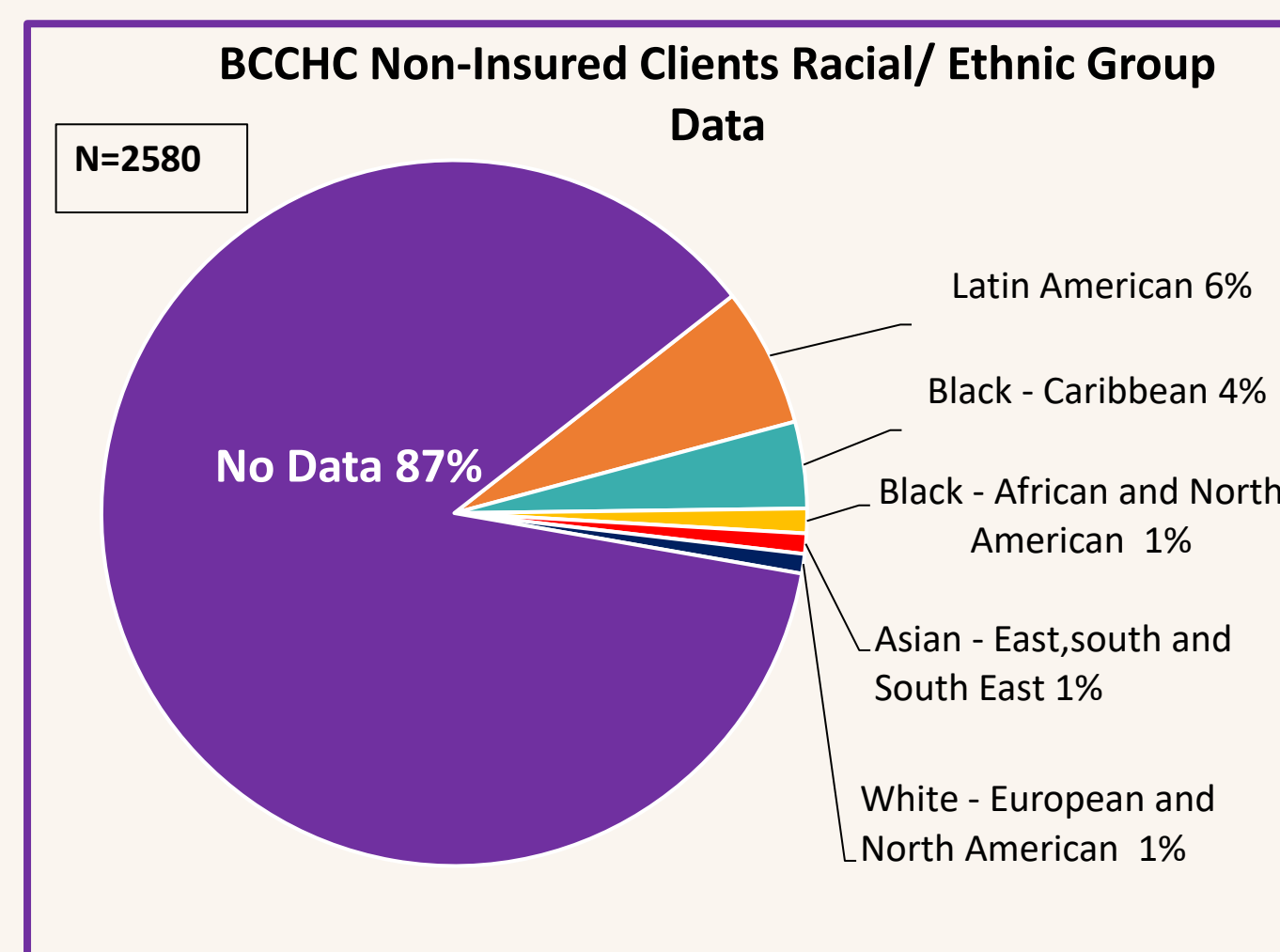
Demographic information, or “equity variables” includes sexual orientation, income, ethnicity, etc., is collected to understand who the centres' client population is and to better plan and implement programs and services to meet their individual needs. Collecting this data is fundamental for eliminating inequitable access to healthcare services and in ensuring quality care is provided.

At BCCHC data is collected through intake forms when a client joins the centre. The clients either fill out on their own or with the help of an intake coordinator. However, in recent years the centre has struggled with high rates of missing data.

Language	Which language do you feel most comfortable speaking to your health care provider in ?
Born in Canada	Were you born in Canada ?
Racial/Ethnic Group	Which of the following best describes your racial/ethnic group ?
Disability	Are you living with any disabilities ?
Gender	What gender do you identify with ?
Sexual Orientation	What sexual orientation best describes you ?
Income	What was your total family income before taxes last year ?
# of people income supports	How many people does this income support ?

A PART OF THE SCRIPT FOR STAFF ON HOW TO ASK INFORMATION FROM CLIENTS

- I analyzed insured and non-insured client data from the previous three years to identify the demographic categories with the highest missing data. These findings were formatted into graphs (as shown below) to inform staff and senior management the current status of the data quality.
- I conducted surveys and focus groups with staff and clients to identify key factors influencing disparities in the data and potential areas of improvement in the centre's data collection process.
 - The surveys with staff highlighted lack of education on the rationale and importance of collecting sociodemographic data and staff discomfort and avoidance of asking these questions as leading factors impacting data quality.
 - The focus groups indicated that clients' sensitivity regarding disclosing information like income level and sexual orientation stemmed from limited English proficiency, and fear around privacy, information collection and usage.



- Based on my findings from the analysis, surveys and literature search, I designed education and training tools for the staff and clients.
 - A tool kit for staff was designed to build their confidence in collecting demographic data and addressing clients concerns and to increase their familiarity with data collection practices. The tool kit included:
 - a standardized data collection workflow.
 - Sample responses and scripts for collecting data.
 - The posters with the theme, “We ask because We care” aimed to increase client's awareness on the purpose of data collection and its use in their care planning at BCCHC.
- As my final task, I designed a e-training module for staff on concepts of health equity, data collection, and data quality to build staff readiness to change for improving data quality.

WE ASK BECAUSE WE CARE

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
“Demographic” means information collected about a group of people that helps to describe them
We collect the following demographic information:

- Language
- Race/Ethnicity
- Disability
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender
- Income
- Length of time in Canada

WHY DO WE ASK?
At Black Creek Community Health Centre, knowing more about your helps us to understand your unique needs. We can provide better quality programs and services for you.

YOU CAN CHOOSE WHAT YOU SHARE WITH US
You can choose the “prefer not to answer” option to any or all questions. This will not impact the care you receive here.

WHO WILL SEE MY INFORMATION?
At Black Creek Community Health Centre we will keep your Information safe. What you share will only be seen and used to provide you with better health care services.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I thoroughly enjoyed my practicum at BCCHC. Being my first time working in the healthcare field, I had an invaluable learning experience that effectively supplemented the theoretical concepts I learned as a Health Management student.

I worked with an extremely supporting multidisciplinary team that provided constructive feedback and guidance because of which I had the opportunity to learn many new skills. For instance, I learned and used data interpretation and analysis skills that I previously did not possess. Most importantly, I learned to communicate clearly and succinctly both in writing and orally and learned a lot about professionalism, setting goals and time management. Overall, in this position I have gained confidence in my skills and my ability to successfully pursue a career in the healthcare industry.

VALUE OF THE PROJECT

Large gaps in the centres' data misrepresents their client population and its needs. This hinders the centres' ability to develop programs and services to address the needs of their vulnerable clients. This project helped to identify and address the challenges to data collection at an individual and organizational level, allowing the centre to ensure that it provides equitable, quality-driven, and client-centered care. The projects focus on increasing value and awareness of purpose of demographic data collection among staff and clients and building staff capacity, helped to ensure effective and successful data collection in the long run.

ADVICE FOR FUTURE STUDENTS

This practicum is a great learning opportunity, it allows you to explore your strengths and weaknesses and potential career interests. Those planning to complete this practicum must first take some time to learn about the organization, and the goal and expectations of your assigned project, this would influence your project planning and success. In the beginning, the work you would do might not be up to professional standards, and that's okay, but it's important you show willingness to learn by asking questions and getting feedback on your work. There will always be people around you who would be happy to share their expertise with you. This way you are more likely to learn more, build confidence in your skills and develop good relationships.