

*Somerset West Community
Health Centre*

CENTRE HIGHLIGHTS

FEBRUARY 2025



YEAR OF THE SNAKE!

2025 is the Year of the Snake, a symbol of wisdom, growth, and renewal. It is a time for reflection and new beginnings.

In keeping with our 20+ year tradition of celebrating together, Somerset West Community Health Centre's Chinese and Vietnamese Community Support Services recently hosted two celebrations to recognize the Lunar New Year and celebrate the Year of the Snake.

These celebrations continue to be a meaningful way to foster health and well-being by recognizing the important connection between belonging and overall health. The events were open to Somerset West clients who participate in our Seniors' programming, and both events featured games, riddles, song and dance, delicious food, and an opportunity for the community to come together. Over 200 clients attended, with many volunteers offering support, entertainment, and their talents to ensure the events ran smoothly. This year, we welcomed Debbie Sullivan, representative from the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility, as our special guest.

Nearly 70 Yet Keen members came together at the Mandarin Restaurant to ring in the Year of the Snake! The event was filled with laughter, delicious food, and great company, as members celebrated this special occasion in style. The atmosphere was lively, with everyone sharing stories and enjoying the festivities.

Community members were so pleased and grateful to come together, and expressed their deep appreciation of the care and efforts of our incredible volunteers at each celebration.



BLACK HEALTH PLAN

Building on our commitment to health equity, Somerset West Community Health Centre has received one the largest investments to advance Black Health in Ottawa from Ontario Health. We have received an investment of \$532,840 annually until March 2026 to provide health promotion and wellness clinics and to advance culturally responsive prevention models. This investment will go a long way to supporting our efforts to advance [A Black Health Plan for Ontario](#) and to reduce health inequities for the Black clients and communities we serve.



CONVERSATIONS ON HOMELESSNESS

Somerset West Community Health Centre partnered with Centretown Community Health Centre, the Centretown Community Association, and the Dalhousie Community Association to hold a community discussion on homelessness. The event brought together local leaders, including MP Yasir Naqvi, MPP Joel Harden, and Councillor Ariel Troster, as well as experts from Operation Come Home, the Ottawa Mission, Salus, and the CCOC. Both in-person and virtual attendees engaged in open dialogue, shared ideas, and discussed solutions to address homelessness in our community. It was a meaningful opportunity to come together and work toward creating positive change.



PRIMARY CARE & REGIONAL PROGRAMS

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

The Primary Health Care team is excited to welcome Dr Jessica MacLean! Dr Jessica MacLean earned a master’s degree in pharmacology and a bachelor's degree in Psychology before becoming a doctor. She finished her family medicine training at the University of Ottawa in 2022.

Her experience spans palliative care at Mount Sinai Hospital to working as a hospitalist in Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority, and more recently providing coverage to several family practices before deciding to put down roots at Somerset West Community Health Centre.



Jessica is no stranger to Somerset West having worked as a locum since 2023 and will assume a practice of her own starting May 12th!

OTTAWA NEWCOMER HEALTH CENTRE

HEALTH SCREENING & EDUCATION EVENT

Our Multicultural Health Navigator team, in partnership with Centretown Community Health Centre and The Ottawa Hospital, organized a community health screening and education event at one of the community shelters housing newcomers and refugees. The aim of the event was to provide preventive screenings and health education to newcomer clients in the comfort of their residence, facilitating access to essential health and social services available in the community. Together, we provided vital health education, screenings, and preventive services to approximately 100 individuals. About 25 clients received flu shots, and 22 hepatitis B tests were ordered.

The Ottawa Newcomer Health Centre received confirmation from Ontario Health of an investment of \$313,443 for 2024–2025 and \$294,943 for 2025–2026 to address anti-racism in pediatric and family health care. This investment will support our efforts to advance culturally appropriate services for racialized communities.



LUNG HEALTH

The Complex Respiratory Care Program hosted a successful Respiratory Care Symposium at the Somerset West Community Health Centre. This hybrid event brought together 25 in-person attendees and 65 virtual participants from various partner organizations across Ottawa and the province. With a focus on home ventilation, the symposium featured expert speakers and clinicians, offering valuable insights and fostering collaboration on best practices in respiratory care. The event proved to be a valuable opportunity for learning, networking, and advancing knowledge in this critical area of healthcare.



FAMILY, COMMUNITY HEALTH & HARM REDUCTION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

ROCHESTER HEIGHTS COMMUNITY HOUSE

As we begin 2025, our Community House continues to grow and serve our residents. We are excited to offer a range of programs and services aimed at enriching the lives of those in our community.

Our Swim for Health initiative provides free passes to the Plant Recreation Centre, one of our valued partners. Through our partnership with the Ottawa School of Art (OSA), we offer art classes to seniors and children in the After School Program (ASP). The demand for the ASP continues to rise, and our dedicated Children's Program Team has been quick to adapt to meet the needs of the children we serve.

In mid-2024, we established the French African Tenants Association in collaboration with the Rochester Heights Community House to foster community engagement. We also support bingo activities, giving tenants opportunities for social interaction while ensuring smooth operations. Additionally, our staff is always available for daily client support, assisting with inquiries and concerns or connecting clients with the many agencies we work with. For those in need, we distribute food when available or provide gift cards as an alternative.

We are proud to offer these services and remain committed to supporting our residents as our community continues to grow.

YET KEEN

Yet Keen has been organizing a weekly lecture series on Traditional Chinese Medicine delivered by one of the Yet Keen seniors who is an acupuncturist from China. The lectures were well attended with 12-14 seniors at each session.

As a result of an outreach effort, Yet Keen worked with the National Arts Centre (NAC) to offer our seniors discounted tickets to the show "Salesman in China" on January 18th, 2025. The play was conducted in Mandarin and English with Chinese subtitles. 22 seniors attended the play and the Asian Art Market, part of the celebration of the Lunar New Year at the NAC. For some of the seniors, it was their first time viewing a program at the NAC. Participants had a wonderful, festive afternoon filled with arts and culture. We look forward to offering more outings to cultural institutions with Yet Keen seniors in the future.

HARM REDUCTION

In late January, the Consumption & Treatment Services (CTS) team was informed that the last day of operations of the consumption site would be February 28th.

As part of this transition, we are planning a Letting Go Ceremony, facilitated by Austin Ward, our Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) Practice Facilitator. This event will honor the incredible advocacy that led to the creation of CTS and recognize the ongoing empathy and compassion the team has shown in serving our community.

This ceremony is a sacred opportunity for us to gather in a circle, pass a feather, and share what's weighing on our hearts. It creates a space for everyone to speak, feel heard, and release those burdens. The beauty of this practice lies in the shared responsibility—it's about lifting the weight off one another's shoulders, so no one carries it alone.

As part of the ceremony, we would work with the four sacred medicines—tobacco, sage, cedar, and sweetgrass—calling upon their healing and grounding presence. Additionally, participants will be invited to write down the things holding them back on a piece of paper. After the circle, these papers will be burned in a fire, symbolically releasing those burdens into the spirit realm and transforming them into something lighter."

While this change has been difficult, staff have done an incredible job remaining present and committed to our clients during this time. Your dedication does not go unnoticed, and we deeply appreciate their efforts



ANONYMOUS HIV TESTING

This month, we started offering regular drop-in testing hours at our 55 Eccles Street location as an alternative to scheduling appointments. Anonymous HIV testing will be available in English or French on a walk-in basis every Monday between 12:00 and 2:00 pm at 55 Eccles Street. Clients seeking testing are encouraged to connect with reception staff and ask for Micah.

Staying up to date with new resources is an ongoing priority for us. This helps us ensure we are sharing practical information with clients in the community as new resources become available to us! In January, we focused on sharing key information about Mpox with local service providers who can help us broaden our reach. Some of these resources from the Community-Based Research Centre include this explainer and lots more at www.mpox.ca.

CATIE has also released new resources geared towards people living with HIV who are considering connecting (or re-connecting) to HIV treatment. We've used this opportunity to touch base with our community partners at our outreach sites to help service providers feel equipped to support clients in connecting to care.

We've also distributed new resources by the The Ontario HIV Treatment Network strategically to partner organizations in Ottawa to help spread awareness of what HIV means for us today. KnowHIV is a brand new website released by the OHTN to serve as an easy way to access relevant information about HIV in Ontario in plain language.

Our regular roster of anonymous HIV testing sites is ongoing. Weekly, we offer evening 2SLGBTQ+ testing with MAX Ottawa, drop-in testing on Mondays from 12:00 to 2:00 pm at 55 Eccles Street, and on-campus testing at the University of Ottawa. We also offer regular testing at Operation Come Home, Centretown Pharmacy, Ottawa Booth Centre, and the NESI evening drop-in

ACB/HIV PREVENTION STRATEGY

We recently collaborated with Caribbean African Regenerative Medicine to host a free webinar titled "Exploring the Problems and Discussing Solutions to the Healthcare Issues that Most Affect African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) Canadians." The event featured a range of insightful speakers and discussions, creating a valuable space for both service providers and service users to share their experiences. Attendees also received resources and referrals to help address healthcare challenges within the ACB community. The webinar was well-attended, with over 100 ACB members participating, highlighting the importance of ongoing dialogue and support around healthcare issues that impact our communities.



CHILDREN & YOUTH

This month has been filled with excitement as we continue to serve our clients through both indoor and outdoor programming. We're thrilled to announce the launch of the I LOVE TO ... DANCE program, proudly supported by the City of Ottawa and Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities. This dynamic initiative has kicked off at our Laroche Park After School Program, where children are already diving into new skills. They're working hard to learn a choreographed routine, which they'll showcase at an upcoming event. We can't wait to see their progress and celebrate their accomplishments!

OTTAWA BLACK MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

This year, Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition staff have been working to streamline communications and began implementing the Communications Plan 2025. In the summer we onboarded Social Media Support volunteers and shifted the focus of our various platforms. In

January 2025, Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition members received their second fully bilingual Quarterly Newsletter in English and French. This was an important step in improving our ability to communicate with our francophone members.

Planning for Black Mental Health Week 2025 is underway. This year's theme is for community, by community! We recognize many factors our member organizations may be facing at this time, with limited funding and staffing challenges. With this in mind, we have shifted to in-person events and are not asking our partners to host events this year. Rather, we ask members to attend the Ottawa Black Mental Health Coalition events we are planning. Of course, any organization that chooses to host an event can do so, and we will cross-promote.

This year we are asking partners to:

- Register for BMHW 2025 and attend the launch and one of our in-person events
- Service providers can register for a Community of Practice conference on March 5
- Participate in the Community Expo as an exhibitor on March 7
- Promote the week of events on social media networks
- Volunteer at an event! Contact Catherine Yorgoro at ottawabmhcoalition@gmail.com

