

Newsroom

Our Stories

Striking levels of poverty, illness found in Aboriginal People living in urban areas: study

Toronto, December 8, 2011

TORONTO, Dec. 8, 2011 — More than 60 per cent of Canada's Aboriginal population live in urban areas and are experiencing high rates of illness, poverty and challenges in access to food and housing security, new research shows.

“We all continue to be shocked by the living conditions in places like Attawapiskat, but it's important to realize this is also happening right here in our backyards,” said Dr. Janet Smylie, lead investigator of the study and a researcher at the Centre for Research and Inner City Health at St. Michael's Hospital.

The *Our Health Counts Urban Aboriginal Health Database project*, a first-of-its-kind health database for urban Aboriginal People in Ontario, was created to fill the gaps in Aboriginal health information and to understand the full extent of health issues and challenges experienced by this population.

Researchers collected data for factors that influence a person's health such as poverty, illness and income for the First Nations population of Hamilton – chosen for its large Aboriginal population and strong infrastructure of Aboriginal community health and social services.

“Public health data for the urban Aboriginal community was almost non-existent,” said Dr. Smylie. “This means often this population is hidden, limiting the policy makers' ability to address the health problems of these communities.”

The study found that almost 80 per cent of the First Nations people living in Hamilton earn less than \$20,000 per year and 70 per cent live in the poorest neighborhoods compared with 25 per cent of the total Hamilton population.

This poverty is accompanied by challenges in access to housing and food security, Dr. Smylie said. Ninety per cent of First Nations people in Hamilton have moved once in last five years and over 50 per cent moved three or more times in last five years.

The report said this population is living with a disproportionate burden of chronic disease and disability. Rates of diabetes are 15.6 per cent – more than three times – that of the total Hamilton population.

Compared to the general population, First Nations people living in Hamilton were also more than twice as likely to visit an emergency room, 25 times more likely to report living in a crowded condition and had children who were more than twice as likely to have asthma.

“There is a great health inequity here,” said Dr. Smylie. “First Nations people have higher health problems yet access to services and care is poorer.”

An innovative sampling technique was used to recruit the 790 participants. Each participant who completed an interview was given a ticket that they could pass on to other people they knew. For every participant recruited, the person who made the recruit received \$10.

“The concept of self-determination around the data is very important,” said Sylvia Maracle, executive director of the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres. “It shows us that this population wants to make a difference in their own health.”

The data collection method used in this study finds people that a census might miss – the 13 per cent of people surveyed who don’t have a home and those with literacy or accessibility issues.

For change to occur, the factors that contribute to these results, such as stable housing and access to food and primary health care need to be addressed, Dr. Smylie said.

The findings are being presented by the Hamilton community and research partners involved in the project at 1:00p.m. on Dec. 8, 2011, at the Honouring Our Circle native women’s centre in Hamilton.

The report is released by the De Dwa Dah Dehs Ney>s Aboriginal Health Centre, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Hamilton Executive Directors’ Aboriginal Coalition and the Our Health Counts Governing Council. It is in partnership with the health research team led by Dr. Janet Smylie. The report is dedicated to the First Nations community in Hamilton. Some of the data was collected through the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences if participants gave their permission.

Media Contact

For more information please contact:

Kate Taylor
Public Relations Specialist
St. Michael’s Hospital
Phone: 416-864-6060 x6537
TaylorKa@smh.ca

About St. Michael’s Hospital

St. Michael’s Hospital provides compassionate care to all who enter its doors. The Hospital also provides outstanding medical education to future health care professionals in more than 23 academic disciplines. Critical care and trauma, heart disease, neurosurgery, diabetes, cancer care, and care of the homeless are among the Hospital’s recognized areas of expertise. Through the Keenan Research Centre and the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, research at St. Michael’s

Hospital is recognized and put into practice around the world. Founded in 1892, the Hospital is fully affiliated with the University of Toronto.

About De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre

De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre's mission is, "To improve the wellness of Aboriginal individuals and of the Aboriginal community by providing services which respect people as individuals with a distinctive cultural identity and distinctive values and beliefs."

De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre assists Aboriginal people in accessing culturally appropriate healthcare programs and services. The Health Centre focuses on holistic preventive and primary healthcare that includes physicians, nurse practitioners, traditional healing and other primary health services. It also offers mental health support, advocacy, outreach and education services. The Health Centre serves all Aboriginal people, regardless of status and offers assistance to outside service organizations to provide care in a culturally sensitive way.