



women's  
health clinic

## MODEL OF CARE

### PHILOSOPHY

Women's Health Clinic Model of Care is based on the following philosophy and principles:

1. All women deserve fundamental respect and have the right to make informed decisions about their health care. In particular, it is recognized that:
  - a. all women bring valuable and diverse experiences as care providers of family and friends, as workers, and as consumers of health services. Their ideas and insights should be encouraged and valued in developing health services appropriate to their needs; and
  - b. women from equity communities, including Aboriginal women, immigrant women, visible and language minority women, women with disabilities, and lesbians, bring unique experiences and insights to an understanding of health and illness. Often marginalized in the planning of health service delivery, their involvement and participation is essential for the development of quality, culturally appropriate services.
2. Health status improves when a person has a greater sense of control over their life situation. Women's Health Clinic is committed to facilitating the empowerment of women, individually and collectively, in all its programs and services.
3. A person's health must be understood holistically, with an appreciation for the interrelationship of physical, social, emotional and spiritual aspects.

### APPROACH

Women's Health Clinic approach to delivery of services is based on the principles and philosophy outlined above. Key elements of woman-sensitive best practices include:

- **Priority Populations**

In keeping with its population health approach, Women's Health Clinic programs and services strive to serve the needs of:

- a. women who are most vulnerable to poor health due to factors such as poverty; and
- b. women who are more likely to experience barriers in accessing appropriate health services due to their ethnic origin, race, social class, language, sexual orientation or disability.

- **Women-Centred Services**

The woman, in the context of her community, is the centre of Women's Health Clinic service planning and delivery. Sufficient time is taken with each woman to gain an understanding of how her unique background and life situation impacts upon her health. Interventions and educational strategies are flexible and varied and may involve linkages beyond the formal health care system. These services may be offered by the Clinic directly or through referral to other service providers or agencies, such as justice, education, housing or employment.

- **Develop A Partnership Between the Woman and Care Provider**

Programs and services are based on the assumption that the woman brings a valuable perspective of her life situation and her body. She must feel empowered to make informed decisions about her health and health care. Accordingly, staff and volunteers de-emphasize differences between woman and care provider, and seek to develop a partnership with her in addressing her health issues.

- **Most Appropriate Caregiver and Services**

Every effort is made to ensure that women receive the most appropriate service, provided by the most appropriate service provider, in the most appropriate location. Women may access services through a variety of avenues and routes of entry as appropriate to their particular situation and needs.

Services and approach offered may include information, education, support through groups or individual counselling, medical treatments, health screening, advocacy, community action, as well as linkages with the secondary, tertiary, rehabilitation and long term care or other sectors.

Services sensitively address a wide range of issues (such as sexuality, childhood sexual abuse, violence) which have not been adequately addressed by health care providers in the past and try to ensure that appropriate care is provided.

- **Team Approach**

Women's Health Clinic staff are made up of an interdisciplinary team of health care providers who work collaboratively and include professional, paraprofessional and volunteer staff.

- **Empowerment**

Programs and services are designed to enhance the understanding, self-care, self-help and self-advocacy abilities of the woman. This is achieved by:

1. providing a wide range of accessible information and education services with a key role being played by the Clinic's Resource Centre, as well as support and training services based on adult education principles;
2. facilitating the development of understanding and skills through social action groups around issues of concern to women such as breast implants, new reproductive and genetic technologies or birthing options; and
3. structuring the Clinic to include a system of participatory management and involvement of community members in agency decision-making and evaluation processes.

- **Use of Peer Volunteers**

Peer volunteers play a key role in promoting the empowerment of clients through modeling self-help skills, demystifying medical information, and bringing community perspectives to the design and delivery of services. Therefore, Women's Health Clinic provides training to women of various backgrounds in order to enable them to develop informal and formal helping and leadership skills in the provision of health information.

- **Community Involvement**

Women's Health Clinic works in partnership with various communities concerned about the health of women, building on the strengths and interests of its partners, including volunteers, clients, service providers or other members of the community.

- **Evaluation and Cost Effectiveness**

Women's Health Clinic recognizes the importance of ongoing review and evaluation of the approaches and service strategies it uses, taking into account sound information and evidence about how programs, services and approaches are meeting the health needs of diverse women. This requires the development of effective methods for feedback and evaluation, both qualitative and quantitative, and attention to the cost-effectiveness of various strategies.

- **Innovative Program Development**

Women's Health Clinic is committed to continuous development and re-focusing of its service approach based on new understandings of women's needs and issues. The Clinic collaborates with community women and researchers and works at integrating newly gained knowledge.

- **Advocacy for System Change**

Women's Health Clinic works to identify critical emerging issues for women's health and brings together key stakeholders to develop innovative policy recommendations which are responsive to women's needs and concerns.

The design and delivery of all Women's Health Clinic programs and services reflect the understanding that:

1. gender is a key determinant of health. For example, women within all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds are at a higher risk than men of experiencing poverty, abuse and violence, all of which serve to seriously undermine health status.
2. women's health status is influenced by a variety of social and structural factors, including social status, income and employment, education, and social supports; and
3. gender-sensitive health care services help women reclaim and re-define normal life transitions (such as childbirth or menopause) which have been overly medicalized or pathologized.
4. health promotion, primary prevention and healthy public policy are essential strategies for improving women's health. In addition to individual work with clients, Women's Health Clinic also emphasizes community and group based approaches as a means to effect positive change in women's health status.

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