

## **Ontario Common Assessment of Need: A client assessment tool for the Community Mental Health & Addictions sector**

**June 21, 2012** – The Ontario Common Assessment of Need (OCAN) is a standardized, consumer-led, decision-making tool that assists with mental health recovery.

Over the past two years the North West Local Health Integration Network was instrumental in initiating, implementing, adopting and spreading the use of the OCAN tool. Alpha Court Non-Profit Housing and the Canadian Mental Health Organization (CMHA), both of which provide mental health and addictions services in Thunder Bay, were early adopters of OCAN and IAR in the North West LHIN. This tool is strongly supported by the Ontario Mental Health sector, OCAN captures the consumer's voice by:

- Identifying individual needs
- Matching these needs to existing service and,
- Highlighting service gaps

The use of OCAN in Community Mental Health & Addictions organizations benefits both clients and health service providers (HSPs) by:

- Enabling consumer-led decision making at an individual level
- Reducing repetitive information gathering
- Standardizing, streamlining and unifying assessments and,
- Providing an overview of the service sector to support informed decision making and planning as a system.

The OCAN assessment will be part of an Integrated Assessment Record (IAR) which allows health service providers within a client's circle of care to view timely assessment information electronically, securely and accurately. The goal is to improve the patient experience and quality of care through clinical integration and use of the assessment tool so that clients know their needs will be addressed in a timely and consistent manner.

Alpha Court Program Director Nicole La Tour says her organization has come to recognize how well the assessment fits with their philosophy and the people they serve. "The tool promotes a partnership between a client and their worker in the client's journey toward recovery by providing a standardized measurement of need from the perspective of both the consumer and the worker, which assist immensely in rehabilitation planning. The OCAN also provides an opportunity for the client to observe the strides they have made over time."

Sharon Pitawanakwat, CMHA Director of Community Development and Services, said health-care service providers often worked together, but information sharing wasn't always timely or efficient. Each time one organization attempted to access information from another, the processes in place would result it days or weeks before information could be released. "IAR speeds up information sharing", she says. "We can now gain access to assessment information immediately as long as it has been uploaded by other services. We're therefore able to co-ordinate our interventions for clients more effectively and thus improve continuity of service for them."

The North West LHIN is working closely in partnership with the Community Care Information Management team to implement OCAN broadly across the North West LHIN. Originally piloted by 4 organizations, an additional 15 health service providers in the North West LHIN are now engaged in implementation of the OCAN.