



THE COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR GATHERING

MARCH 9, 2023



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As Health Commons, we acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and sacred territories and lands we call home across what is now known as Canada. Health Commons is located in Tkaronto, now known as Toronto, which is on the traditional territory of many Nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, Anishinaabe, Chippewa, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples. Tkaronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands, and is Dish With One Spoon Treaty Territory.

We recognize that for many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, relationship with the land is profoundly important to their sense of self and place. We are grateful for teachings we have been gifted about how the land heals and nurtures by gifting the languages, stories, songs, ceremonies, and protocols that guide and sustain many First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities and Nations.

We carry tremendous privilege in being guests on these lands, and take seriously our responsibility to understand, reflect on, and then take meaningful action to improve our relationships to these lands and to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples who are the original stewards of these lands and who continue to host us here. We are committed to doing whatever we can and are invited to do, and to work alongside communities to create space for healing, reparation, and wellbeing for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and the lands, skies, and waters that surround and nourish us.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HOST OF THE EVENT

A special thank you to Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Center for hosting The Gathering.

SYSTEM LEADERS AND SPEAKERS

Carie Gall, Ontario Health

Charlotte Naranjit

Connie Clerici, Closing the Gap

Tai Huynh, Open Lab

Angela Duckworth, Carea

Kimberley Lepine, Carea

ORGANIZATIONS

- [Access Alliance](#)
- [CMHA Peel Dufferin](#)
- [Community Support Centre for Essex County](#)
- [East Toronto Health Partners](#)
- [Flemingdon Health Center](#)
- [Punjabi Community Health Services](#)
- [Rexdale Community Health Centre](#)
- [Roots Community Services](#)
- [Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities](#)
- [The Neighbourhood Organization](#)
- [Vaughan Community Health Center](#)

GLOBAL PANELISTS

Anum Anwar & Hira Khan, Meethi
Zindagi - Pakistan

Besan Yousuf, Shamsuna - SAIB, Jordan

Dr. Ruth Verhey, Friendship Bench -
Zimbabwe

Rubina Anwar, Sindh Lady Health Worker
Program - Pakistan

Saira Koolman & Paulina Sedney,
Hertselbureau - Amsterdam

VENDORS

Graphic Recording [ThinkLink Graphics](#)

Lunch [Honey Soul Food](#)

Photography [Carlos Osorio](#)

Snacks [Twin Pops](#)

Videography [Tammy Lynne](#)

OPENING REMARKS

The **Community Ambassador Gathering** was supported by Health Commons Solutions Lab and hosted at Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Center. The Gathering brought together a diverse group of Community Ambassadors serving **17 communities across Ontario**.

The aim of the Community Ambassadors Gathering was to **share best practices** and **build relationships** between Community Ambassadors, Health Commons and system partners through an in-person continuation of our regular virtual meetings.

Approximately **45 Community Ambassadors** from Ontario, **6 global special guests** in the peer and social support sector, and **4 system leaders** from Ontario Health, OpenLab, Closing the Gap and Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Centre attended the Gathering – along with most of the Health Commons team!

We know the pandemic has impacted marginalized communities disproportionately and has exacerbated existing inequities. Community Ambassadors are continually working build and strengthen relationships and trust to increase access to equitable health care and to improve health outcomes. **Their role is having a tremendous impact on the lives of the people they are serving**, and this event was a poignant celebration of their efforts and unique roles in supporting the health care system.



DOCUMENT OVERVIEW - key sections

ABOUT COMMUNITY AMBASSADORS

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- [What do Community Ambassadors do?](#)
- [Areas Community Ambassadors support](#)

THE COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR GATHERING

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- [Global Models of Innovation](#)
- [Workshop 1: Innovation Exchange](#)
- [Workshop 2: Imagining the future](#)
- [How Community Ambassadors are uniquely positioned to do this work - core competencies](#)
- [Closing remarks](#)
- [Infographic about the day](#)

**CLICK [HERE](#) TO WATCH A
3 MINUTE VIDEO ABOUT THE
DAY!**

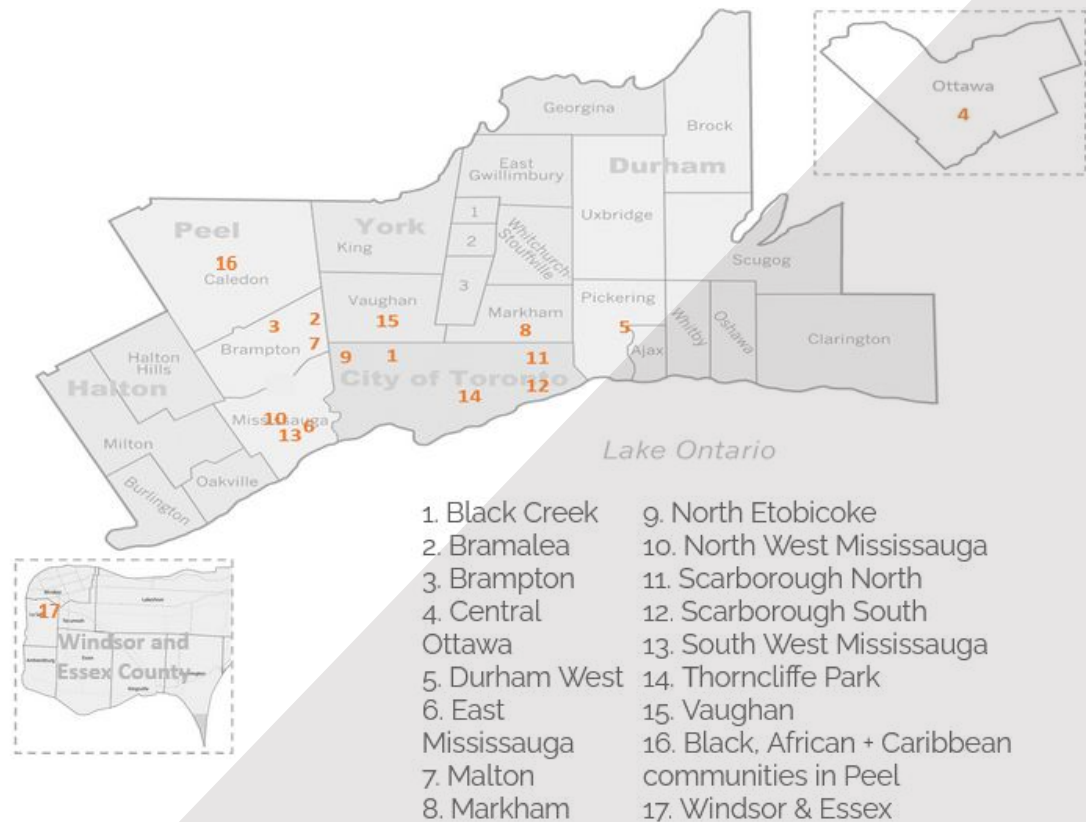


ABOUT COMMUNITY AMBASSADORS

HOW DID THIS ROLE COME ABOUT?

The Community Ambassador Program is part of the [High Priority Community Strategy](#). Under the Strategy, in 2020, the government funded community agencies in 17 communities across Ontario with high rates of community transmission of COVID-19, racialization and/or material deprivation. The intention was to implement or expand their local, equity-driven efforts aimed at addressing these issues and closing the gap in access and support for those hardest hit by the pandemic.

The pandemic expanded roles that previously existed and also tailored the role of Community Ambassadors to the specific needs of the communities that the Strategy was created to fill.



WHAT DO COMMUNITY AMBASSADORS DO?

Community Ambassadors are deeply **connected** to their communities. They provide **information, resources** and **wrap-around support** to marginalized communities. They help with **navigating** the health care system and follow-up to ensure the communities they serve get a warm hand-off to health partners and receive **appropriate and effective care**.

They take their **time** to **listen** with **empathy** and to build **trust**, which are the building blocks of **access** and **better health outcomes**.

Community Ambassadors are helping to improve the health outcomes of marginalized communities by connecting, navigating and building trust within the health care system.



“

WE WALK WITH EMPATHY NO MATTER WHAT. WE ARE PATIENT AND WE GIVE PEOPLE TIME THEY CAN'T FIND OTHER PLACES. WE BOOST PEOPLE UP, REMINDING THEM ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE DOING WELL.

”



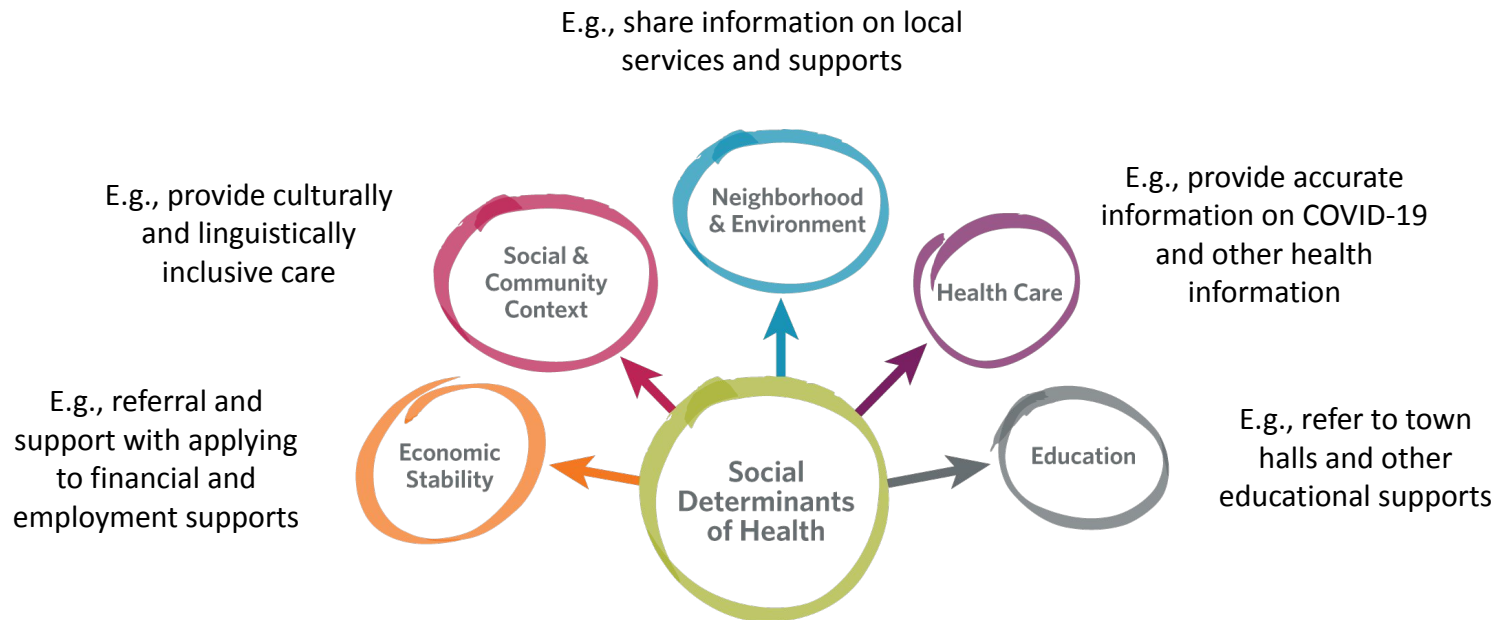
“

**MANY PEOPLE ARE
STRUGGLING AND WE TELL
THEM WHERE TO GO FOR HELP.
SOMETIMES THERE IS STIGMA
AND WE HAVE TO CHANGE
THESE PERCEPTIONS.**

”

AREAS COMMUNITY AMBASSADORS SUPPORT

Here are some specific examples of what Community Ambassadors do day-to-day, as part of their wrap-around support model. Community Ambassadors are situated within the realm of prevention and ongoing health maintenance, and do not diagnose, screen, provide clinical care etc. Each Community Ambassador is working in a way that meets the specific needs of the community they work within, and no two communities are the same. **The social determinants of health combine with a health need to create a unique complexity that requires a different approach in each community.**





THE COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR GATHERING

STRUCTURE OF THE DAY

We opened the day with a reflection on the land and commitment the we have made to respect First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. Carea Community Health Centre shared about the programs they have to serve and support First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and opportunities for others to engage in this work.

This set the tone to explore global models of innovation, where we spoke with Community Ambassadors around the world to see how they approach their work. The day was filled with interactive activities and networking that focused on local challenges and how Community Ambassadors are and will continue to respond, to support and improve health outcomes.



Agenda

- 09:30 - **Registration**
- 10:00 - **Welcome**
- 10:05 - **Land acknowledgement & spotlight on Carea**
- 10:45 - **Global Models of Social Innovation & Peer Support**
- 11:00 - **Panel Discussion**
- 11:30 - **Wellness Break #1 (led by Charlotte Naranjit)**
- 11:45 - **Workshop 1: Innovation Exchange**
- 13:00 - **Lunch**
- 13:40 - **Workshop 2: Imagining the Future**
- 14:30 - **Wellness Break #2 (led by Charlotte Naranjit)**
- 14:50 - **Closing Remarks and Thanks**
- 15:00 - **Marketplace/Networking**



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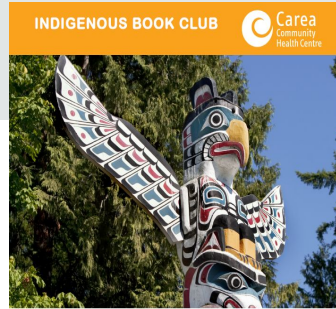
**ONE OF THE MAJOR HURDLES
WAS DISTRUST OF MEDICAL
PROFESSIONALS. BUT SINCE
I'VE WORKED IN THIS SPACE
FOR 20 YEARS, IT WAS EASIER
FOR ME TO BUILD RAPPORT.**

”

SPOTLIGHT: CAREA COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER

We started the day with a spotlight on the [Indigenous Programs](#) offered by Carea Community Health Centre, led by Angela Duckworth in partnership with the community. Our intention was to amplify their work which includes many culturally-rooted offerings like feasts, ceremonies, Big Drum socials, book clubs, storytelling, sharing circles and spaces, counselling, and more.

Want to learn more about these programs? Click any of images/videos below!



Totem Poles document stories, they share the history and events of an individual, a family or a Nation. They share territorial rights, songs, dances, clans and they are unique to the Indigenous Peoples in which they represent.

Like the Totem Pole, we all have a story that is unique to us. Through a collection of books by Indigenous authors we will come to understand Indigenous History, identity, social and economical challenges, but most importantly the resiliency of Indigenous People.

Mondays
Via ZOOM
1:00pm – 2:30pm

Enabish Healing Lodge & Learning Centre
OSCC55+
Ottawa's Indigenous Community Centre

[Click here for Zoom Link](#)



INDIGENOUS CURRENT EVENTS
Open to all!

See art, culture, news stories, and politics through an Indigenous lens.

Tuesdays
Via ZOOM
9:30am to 10:15am

Enabish Healing Lodge & Learning Centre
OSCC55+
Ottawa's Indigenous Community Centre

[Click here for Zoom Link](#)



Self-identified First Nation, Inuit and Métis

Connecting through conversation as we share culture, stories and experiences.

Wednesdays
Via ZOOM
1:00pm to 3:00pm

Enabish Healing Lodge & Learning Centre

[Click here for Zoom Link](#)
Meeting ID: 928 7797 8345
Password: 422013



Our Traditional Drum group, Wiingushk Deywegyun welcomes all identifying First Nations, Métis and Inuit Males to sit at the Drum and learn songs and Traditions.

We also invite all other Community members to join us as well and enjoy in the sharing of Song and Teaching in support of our boys and men.

This Odeywegyun was formed under the guidance of Mishoom John Rice and given it's name by the members of the Indigenous Community

Thursday Nights
6:00pm to 8:00pm

Wiingushk means Sweetgrass and Deywegyun meaning Heartbeat or Drum.

[Click here for the Zoom link](#)

GLOBAL MODELS OF INNOVATION

This panel explored the roles and accomplishments of Community Ambassadors from across the world, including Zimbabwe, Netherlands, Jordan and Pakistan. Local Community Ambassadors and global peers had a lively conversation about how they collectively address the needs and priorities of their communities. All around the world, Community Ambassadors and peer workers are working in marginalized communities to build trust and improve access to health care services and health outcomes.

With contributions from each global partner, we made this [video](#) to spotlight their impact and work.



Paulina Sedney
Team Manager
HerstelBureau-HVO
Querido



Saira Koolman
Assistant Trainer
HerstelBureau-HVO
Querido



Ruth Verhey
International
Friendship Bench
Lead



Besan Yousef
Youth Development
Consultant - SAIB
NGO

Photos unavailable
for:

**Anum Anwar & Hira
Khan**, Meethi
Zindagi - Pakistan

Rubina Anwar, Sindh
Lady Health Worker
Program - Pakistan



“

I PROVIDE PANDEMIC SAFETY GUIDELINES AS WELL AS INFORMATION AND RESOURCES ON PRIMARY CARE, MENTAL HEALTH AND PHYSICAL HEALTH.

”

WORKSHOP 1: INNOVATION EXCHANGE

During our first workshop, we facilitated a “Dragons Den” style activity where we invited four health system leaders from OpenLab, Closing the Gap, Health Commons Solutions Lab and Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Centre.



MEET THE DRAGONS

WORKSHOP 1: INNOVATION EXCHANGE

Community Ambassadors were asked to brainstorm potential solutions to some of the problems they see in their communities, and we asked them to pitch their ideas to the “Dragons”. Here are the innovative solutions they pitched:

1. **“Neighbour Eats” app to address food insecurity** in a dignified and culturally inclusive way
2. **Supporting mental health, income security, and employment readiness for youth** through an app and website that support access and navigation for various employment related services

“

MYSELF AND THE ORGANIZATION ARE TAKING STEPS TO COMBAT SYSTEMIC BARRIERS THAT ARE BEING EXPERIENCED BY THE BLACK, AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY. WE DO A LOT OF ENGAGEMENT WITH PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS.

”



WORKSHOP 1: INNOVATION EXCHANGE



“

I SEE THE IMPACT OF MY WORK THROUGH THE PEOPLE WHO CONNECT WITH US. PEOPLE TELL ME, I CALL YOU AND YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I NEED.

”

3. **Supporting seniors wellness and aging at home** through an app to connect them to social, community, and safety supports and services that enable independence, connection, and dignity at home
4. **“One stop shop”** program to support people in navigating the complexities of the health care system, to **reduce barriers to accessing care**
5. **Community communication channels** that connect people to local tools, information and resources to **reduce barriers to accessing health and wellness information**

A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a white dress and a name tag, is smiling and writing in a notebook. She is surrounded by other people in a community setting. The background is slightly blurred, showing a whiteboard and other attendees. A large pink diagonal graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image.

“

**WE BUILD STRONG, TRUSTING
RELATIONSHIPS. WE BECOME
A HUGE RESOURCE TO OUR
COMMUNITY. SOMEONE TOLD
ME: ‘YOU ARE MY GOOGLE’.**

”



**HOW ARE COMMUNITY AMBASSADORS
UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO DO THIS WORK?**

WORKSHOP 2: IMAGINING THE FUTURE

Community Ambassadors understand the needs of the communities they work within because they are a member of the community. Critical considerations when selecting who becomes a Community Ambassador include that they understand and are a part of the community; speak the language of the community, both linguistically and culturally; and know how to create a safer space for people to ask questions and seek support (by listening non-judgmentally and sharing resources that are culturally relevant and appropriate). All of this is critical to them working closely with health care providers, sector partners and communities to bridge gaps in access and trust.



“

YOU HAVE TO BE A PERSON WHO INSPIRES OTHERS IN THE WAY YOU GIVE INFORMATION. WE CANNOT TELL PEOPLE WHAT TO DO, BUT WE CAN INSPIRE THEM BY THE WAY WE TALK TO THEM.

”



“

WE ADAPT, AND OUR ROLE IS ALWAYS CHANGING BECAUSE IT HAS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE WE ARE SERVING AND THOSE NEEDS DON'T ALWAYS STAY THE SAME.

”

CORE COMPETENCES

- **Knowledge translation:** Community Ambassadors are translating complex medical, clinical or technical language into something that is more culturally relevant, easier to understand and appropriate to the communities they support.
- **Human touch:** Community Ambassadors are humans in a system that often feels cold, technical and disconnected from relationship and people. For example, they went door to door to offer COVID testing and vaccines, hand out PPE, connect people to services, share meals etc. during the height of the pandemic.
- **Trust and respect:** Because Community Ambassadors are a consistent face for communities, they quickly build trust and deep relationships with people. This is critical in a health system where rotating, unpredictable and unfamiliar clinicians or providers is common. There is a reason that Community Ambassadors are asked for by name!
- **Practical navigation:** Community Ambassadors make complex systems easier and more logical to navigate, and through that make them friendlier and more user-friendly. This navigation often includes helping people address personal or social issues and listening deeply to make sure they feel heard and are connected to the support they need, how they need it.
- **Voice of community:** Community Ambassadors provide unfiltered insights into what is happening on the ground – something that is generally far removed from decision and policy making spaces. For example, they know where gaps in services are or how services/messaging are resonating with people.

CORE COMPETENCIES

WE VALIDATE AND LISTEN TO PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND THEIR NEEDS, PRIORITIES, AND CONCERNS, TO HEAR WHERE THEY'RE AT AND WHAT'S IN THE WAY OF MOVING FORWARD.

WE SUPPORT FAMILIES TO ACCESS SUPPORT SERVICES THAT ARE TAILORED TO THEIR SPECIFIC DYNAMICS AND UNIQUE NEEDS.





“

WHAT I ENJOY MOST IS
SERVING THE COMMUNITY
AND GIVING A PERSONAL
TOUCH. I REALLY GET TO
KNOW SOMEONE AND GO
THE EXTRA MILE.

”

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE ACTIVITIES

CAREA SPOTLIGHT

- Their diverse suite of virtual and in-person programming and advocacy supports clients and families in the community with a robust, holistic approach to wrap-around care that is deeply rooted in First Nations, Inuit and Métis culture, worldviews and values

PANEL SUMMARY

- Peer support and Community Ambassador programs are successful because of the trust and credibility that stems from the lived experience and shared identity with community members they support
- Pivoting to a virtual means of connecting within the pandemic sufficed, but is not a replacement for in-person interactions, collaboration and creativity that are required to ensure these programs thrive and achieve their full potential
- Community Ambassadors support navigating and connecting underserved communities with health services, playing key roles in comprehensive care delivery and advancing health equity

INNOVATION EXCHANGE

- Community Ambassadors are embedded in the community and, when given the space and opportunity, can think of exciting innovations that are deeply informed by their work in the community

IMAGINING THE FUTURE

- Community Ambassadors play unique roles in contributing to the lives of their community members, as they navigate and connect them with roles, resources and opportunities with an assets-based and empathetic approach, and will continue to evolve these roles into the future

CLOSING REMARKS

“The role of Community Ambassadors made an incredible impact to the High Priority Communities they serve and was essential to the strategy overall. Community Ambassadors allowed the health system to have a much deeper reach into communities, and in ways the health system did not have had the capacity to do.

During the height of the pandemic, Community Ambassadors were out in their communities, putting themselves at risk with the intent of supporting their communities. Community Ambassadors could be found out in the community, in the grocery stores, the bus stations, and clinics providing critical information about testing, and vaccines. At times, when no one else was out there, Community Ambassadors listened and had meaningful conversations with people to understand their concerns. They used the information they gathered to make a difference and imagine new ways of providing effective support. Community Ambassadors were also able to share information gathered with the health care system to enable impactful changes to be made and to allow new ways to provide effective support to be developed. Community Ambassadors help to build relationships with community, in particular segments of the community that are harder to reach. This has allowed us to have continued conversations with the community as we evolve the strategy from testing and vaccination to mental health, cancer screening, chronic diseases and more. Community Ambassadors have continually informed the strategy through these relationships and provided health system planners with the nuances to meet the concerns of community. Community Ambassadors allowed health system planners to strategize differently and were key to planning effective approaches.

We would like to thank Community Ambassadors for all the work they have done and continue to do as we work on health system recovery.”

- Carrie Gall, Director, System Strategy, Planning, Design & Implementation
Ontario Health Central

THE GATHERING HIGHLIGHTS

