



Workshop 17:

Legal Problems Harm Health: Learn Legal Help Skills to Improve Health Outcomes

Presenters:

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Description:

This workshop introduces two initiatives that build skills to address health-harming legal needs. It explores access to justice as a social determinant of health, including how to identify legal aspects of health problems and how to connect community members to low-barrier legal information and support.

Session objectives and learning outcomes:

- Describe how legal issues can negatively affect health and how legal solutions can improve health outcomes
- Understand how collaboration between the health and justice sectors improves health equity and patients' health outcomes
- Identify sources of reliable legal information, accessible legal services, and training to help address health-harming legal needs

Full description:

Recognizing that legal problems often compromise health, this session introduces two programs that share skills with participants to help them address patients' health-harming legal issues. Building an understanding of the connections between legal problems and poor health, these initiatives provide new tools to improve community health outcomes and address health inequities.

Recent socioeconomic shifts in Ontario have led to crises in areas that span health care and law, including housing and shelter, precarious employment, and domestic violence. Working collaboratively across these sectors can help improve access to justice and health.

Access to justice plays a significant role in the health of individuals and populations, yet it is not often viewed as one of the social determinants of health. It involves a person's ability to address law-related problems and obtain appropriate legal information and services. Common legal problems such as eviction, job loss, or accessing/maintaining income assistance can have a significant impact on physical and mental health.

Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO) and Community Advocacy & Legal Centre (CALC) have developed programs to support social service workers and primary health care providers to identify potential health-harming legal needs and make referrals to low-barrier legal services. As with early identification of health issues, early detection of legal problems can improve outcomes and prevent complications.

A health-harming legal need is a problem "that is best addressed through joint legal care and healthcare ." This includes legal issues related to housing, employment, immigration, and income assistance, to name a few. CLEO has developed training to assist front-line workers/health care

providers to support patients. It includes a series of how-to steps: detect legal issues, identify sources of reliable legal information, and make appropriate referrals to low- or no-cost legal services.

In this workshop, participants will get an introduction to these skills and how to access training that can be tailored to their teams' needs. The workshop also introduces CALC's new Justice and Health Learning Centre, an online course and resource hub for health care providers to learn about access to justice as a determinant of health, how unmet legal needs can result in physical and mental illness, and how to find additional sources of legal information and support. Participants in the workshop will learn what led to the creation of the Justice and Health Learning Centre and how they can use it to support their patients.

Both initiatives have been informed by consultation with health care providers and social service workers. We evaluate and measure the impact of these programs on an ongoing basis to provide the most relevant and useful legal information and training.