Supporting Patients First by mapping access to primary care

Rick Glazier

With the passage of Ontario's *Patients First Act* in 2016, the province's 14 Local Health Integration Networks assumed responsibility for planning and performance improvement for the primary health care system. The Act requires that this planning take place at smaller regional levels to better address the unique health care needs of the province's diverse urban, rural and remote communities.

Some of the groundwork for this more localized planning has been undertaken by the Ontario Community Health Profiles Partnership (OCHPP), using data held at ICES. Guiding the project is **Rick Glazier**, a senior scientist at ICES and lead of its primary care and population health research program. Dr. Glazier is also a scientist at the Centre for Urban Health Solutions at St. Michael's Hospital.

Glazier and his team were approached by the Toronto Central LHIN to create neighbourhood-level maps for prioritizing resource allocation. By linking primary care records with geographic and demographic data, the team identified areas where residents were less likely to be attached to a primary care physician and where continuity of care was low.

"Low attachment and low continuity mean disordered care," explains Glazier. "Where people don't have regular access to a family doctor, we see chaotic patterns of health system use, with more use of emergency services and less use of preventative measures like cancer screening and diabetes care. That's where you'll see higher health costs."

The neighbourhood mapping process is gradually being applied across Ontario, with planners at other LHINs requesting similar data.

To support local capacity building, the OCHPP maintains an open-access web data portal. The tool enables health policy planners and local agencies to interact with the data for planning purposes. For example, the Toronto Central LHIN, a partner in the OCHPP, has been using the tool to plan local access to interprofessional care, including Family Health Teams and Community Health Centres.

"By bringing together the issues of primary care and population health, we can see how they overlap and influence each other," says Glazier. "Looking at these interactions in the context of equity and geography, we can map, neighbourhood by neighbourhood and region by region, where health investment is most needed in Ontario."

Working in partnership with the **Toronto Central LHIN**, ICES researchers have used administrative and other data held at ICES to create **neighbourhood-level maps** that pinpoint areas where patients have low access to primary care.

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The **Ontario Community Health Profiles Partnership** uses linked data from ICES to maintain a **web portal** that allows health policy planners and local agencies such as Community Health Centres to interact with the data for planning purposes.