

2018 Seed Funding Competition Awardees

Title: Investigating Mental Health Care Utilization Trajectories & Mental Health Outcomes Among Transgender Individuals in Ontario. **PI: Dr. Alex Abramovich**

Abstract: Background: It is well documented that transgender (trans) individuals in Canada experience significant physical and mental health challenges and multiple barriers accessing health care, as a result of stigma, discrimination, and structural violence. However, trans health continues to be an understudied area and trans identities are rarely included in health research. Gender identity information has yet to be routinely collected in administrative data and electronic health records, making it difficult to identify trans individuals within population-based data sources, leading to minimal knowledge regarding the health care utilization patterns of trans individuals. In order to conduct rigorous and meaningful analysis of the trans population, trans individuals must be systematically identified in health care administrative data. Hypothesis: The mental health care utilization trajectories and mental health outcomes among trans individuals in Ontario reveal disproportionate rates of mental illness and higher rates of Emergency Department (ED) visits and hospitalizations due to suicidality, compared to the general population, especially for trans individuals waiting for gender affirming medical interventions, including gender confirming surgery. Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate mental health care utilization trajectories among trans individuals in Ontario, in order to understand when, where, and how to intervene to improve mental health outcomes and treat mental illness. This study also aims to investigate utilization of health care for mental health and psychiatric related reasons, and prevalence of hospitalizations and ED visits, due to mental illness, suicidality, and mental health related reasons, compared to the general population. Up to eight health clinics from across Ontario, with expertise in working with the trans population, will participate in this study. Participating health clinics will provide the health card numbers for all of their trans identified patients from 2012 to present. Data will be linked with administrative health care data housed at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES). This will be the first study to use high quality data from primary care and psychiatric settings to identify a large number of trans individuals over the entire age range. This will also be the first time that trans individuals are identified in the ICES data repository.

The specific aims of this study are to: 1) Describe the overall physical and mental health and the mental health care utilization trajectories of the trans population compared to the general population 2) Estimate costs for mental health care utilization of the trans population vs general population. 3) Investigate prevalence of hospitalizations and ED visits for the trans population compared to the general population, due to mental illness, suicide ideation and attempts, and mental health related reasons.

Significance: This study will produce new knowledge that has the potential to transform the understanding and treatment of mental illness and mental health care amongst the trans population. The anticipated public and scientific benefits include that this study will strengthen understanding and knowledge on the factors underlying mental health disparities experienced by the trans population and help create policies to improve the mental health care system and treatment of trans individuals.