



SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ONTARIO)

ADVOCACY BULLETIN

HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE SUPPORT SERVICES (HCCSS) RETURNS FUNDS TO MINISTRY OF HEALTH AS CLIENTS UNABLE TO ACCESS ADEQUATE HOME CARE

OCTOBER 23, 2023

In filing a Freedom of Information request, Seniors for Social Action Ontario has learned that at least seven HCCSS offices have returned millions of dollars to the Ministry of Health as of March 31, 2022. Only 7 of 14 HCCSS offices have recent financial statements up in the Documents Library of HCCSS found here - <https://healthcareathome.ca/document-library/> Most of the financial statements are found on page 4 of the Documents Library, and individuals can click on those pertinent to their areas. Funds returned to the Ministry of Health are usually found on Page 9, but Erie St. Clair is found on page 10, and Waterloo Wellington, which is only posted in French, is found on page 11.

Here are the figures for each of the offices posted:

1. Toronto Central	\$ 3,820,774
2. Champlain	\$24,336,471
3. South East	\$13,499,565
4. Central West	\$ 4,018,026
5. Erie St. Clair	\$ 6,560,036
6. Central East	\$20,100,595
7. Waterloo Wellington	\$ 5,507,927

Total \$77,843,394

There are no recent financial statements posted that SSAO was able to locate for the other seven HCCSS area offices.

In filing the Freedom of Information Request to the HCCSS Central East office asking the following questions, the Chair of SSAO received the answer (below):

Question from SSAO:

Your office's financial statement dated March 31, 2022 under the heading Due to MOH on page 9 seems to show that CE HCCSS returned \$20,100,595.00 to the Ministry of Health at the end of the fiscal year. Is this correct, and if so, why were these funds returned?

Response from Laszlo Cifra, Director, HCCSS, Central East:

“In accordance with the Ministry-LHIN Accountability Agreement, in each fiscal year, the LHIN is required to plan for, and achieve an Annual Balanced Budget. An Annual Balanced Budget is defined by the MOH as total revenues are greater than or equal to the total expenses, in any fiscal year. Any excess of funding over expenses (surplus) cannot be carried over to the following fiscal year and is required to be returned to the MOH. This requirement is outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding between the LHIN and the MOH as follows:

Specifically, when ordered to do so by the Minister of Finance and/or the President of the Treasury Board, pursuant to section 16.4 of the Financial Administration Act, the Agency must pay into the Consolidated Revenue Fund any money that the Minister of Finance and/or the President of the Treasury Board determines is surplus to its requirements.

At the end of fiscal 2021/22, the cumulative surpluses are recorded as “Due to MOH” and are held as payable until recovered by the ministry.”

No further explanation was supplied as to why this money was not spent by this area office and was returned to the Ministry of Health (MOH).

However, the Ministry of Health’s Director of the Home and Community Care Branch did supply this response.

“As per Government Accounting Policy, the Ministry of Health is required to conduct year end settlements, which includes an analysis of the expenditures incurred by Health Service Providers (HSPs), including Home and Community Care Support Services, against all sources of revenues received for each fiscal year. Once the settlement is completed, surplus funds (i.e., excess of revenue over eligible expenditures incurred) are recovered from the HSPs in future years.

Recovery of funding in any given year, may be as a result of cumulative surplus funds from the current year, plus surplus funds from previous fiscal years.

Whether there are surplus funds, and the reason for them, may vary from year to year. Home and Community Care Support Services seeks to maximize the use of funding across the 14 organizations, taking into account demand and available capacity to deliver care. As with the rest of the health system, gaps in workforce capacity may mean that a number of Home and Community Care Support Services organizations are not able to fully utilize available funding. The ministry may authorize the transfer of funding to other Home and Community Care Support Services organizations on a one-time basis. If funding cannot be used by any Home and Community Care Support Services organization, then it may create a surplus that is returned to the government on a one-time basis.

The ministry has implemented a range of supports for the workforce and notes that home care is delivering more services than ever before.”

This may require a short translation with respect to what this tells us:

- The Ministry of Health analyzed the expenditures of HCCSS against all of its sources of revenue for the fiscal year and found surplus funds;
- These funds may have resulted from cumulative surplus funds from the previous fiscal years;
- Capacity to deliver care because of shortages of workers may have caused HCCSS area offices to not meet demand for home care in their areas;
- The MOH allows funds to be transferred between area offices if this is the case;
- Funding that is not used even when transfers have occurred is returned to the Ministry;
- It appears that in spite of attempts to attract more home care workers, at least seven area offices collectively still underspent by almost \$78,000,000.

Analysis

The Government of Ontario announced on April 25, 2022 that it was investing “\$1 billion more over the next three years to further expand home care. This funding will benefit the nearly 700,000 families who rely on home care annually, preventing unnecessary hospital and long-term care admissions and shortening hospital stays. Expanding home care will provide Ontarians with the choice to stay in their home and help with hospital capacity to keep the province open.” (Ontario Government, 2022).

Seven HCCSS Area Offices underspent almost \$78 million in existing Home Care funding which was returned to the Ministry on March 31, 2022 just over three weeks before this announcement of more money for Home Care was made. Seven other HCCSS area offices have yet to even post their financial statements in the HCCSS Documents Library.

This raises several questions:

1. Will the Ontario government return this \$78 million plus any additional funds as yet unreported by the other HCCSS area offices that were also returned to general revenues, and invest that funding in the Family Managed Home Care and into an Intensive Supports at Home program for people with complex needs? Family Managed Care is a direct funding program that allows individuals to arrange their own support services. Putting money directly into the hands of caregivers and allowing them to find and pay people to care for their loved ones might be a better approach than the Ministry’s current recruitment methods.

2. Will the Ministry and HCCSS and the Ontario Health Teams concentrate their staff recruitment efforts in the areas served by area offices that returned the most funding to the Ministry of Health because of lack of capacity to serve their clients?
3. Will the Ministry do something innovative like provide signing bonuses to staff willing to work for those HCCSS offices provided that they stay for a year or more?
4. Will the Ministry also consider a Paid Family Caregiver option since this could be one component of solving the staffing crisis?

SSAO thinks individuals, families, and caregivers could do a better job of providing care and recruiting people to do so than the Ministry of Health and HCCSS. What do you think?

We think it's time for you to ask your MPP to put these questions to the Minister of Health.

REFERENCES

Ontario Government. (April 25, 2022). Ontario investing \$1 billion more to expand Home Care. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002107/ontario-investing-1-billion-more-to-expand-home-care>