Evaluating the implementation and impact of an online tool used within primary care to improve the income security of patients with complex health and social needs in Ontario and Manitoba

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- Marlene Chiarotto
- Layla Rich
- May Wong
Founded in 1986, Prosper Canada is a national charity dedicated to expanding economic opportunity for Canadians living in poverty through program and policy innovation.

Our aim is to ensure that all financially vulnerable Canadians have access to the financial policies, programs, products and advice they need to build their financial wellbeing.

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- Layla Rich
- May Wong
Background / Purpose

- Interventions addressing social determinants of health (SDOH) rarely found within our health care system

- Risk factors such as diet, exercise, alcohol use routinely addressed by family medicine – why not factor poverty into clinical decision making like other risk factors?
• Gap in community-based primary healthcare

• Anecdotal evidence suggests positive impact of increased income on patients’ health, however, no rigorous research evidence in Canada to confirm this
  • Eg. Mothers who received MB Prenatal Benefit (max. $81/month) had reduced rates of Low Birth Weight, pre-term births, and babies Small for gestational age

• Poverty tool

• MB adaptation
- 20-page plain language booklet developed in Manitoba
- Lists many federal, provincial, and regional benefits and programs available to eligible individuals and families in MB
THOSE REASONS YOU DIDN’T FILE YOUR TAXES LAST YEAR?

a) it’s too hard  
b) no computer  
c) I need advice  
d) worried that I’ll owe  
e) all of the above  
f) other  

Let’s overcome them in 2017 so you can get your benefits.

WE’RE A FREE SERVICE. CONTACT US TODAY.
Objectives of Study

- Develop new knowledge on how to address SDOH in clinical settings
- Evaluate implementation of an online tool as intervention on a key SDOH
  - Consider jurisdictional or context specific concerns?
  - Effect of implementation on regular workflow of primary health care organizations?
  - Short-term impact on awareness of benefits and community resources?
- Help providers screen patients for income security and where necessary, recommend local benefit resources
- Assess perspectives on use of online tool in primary care
  - Providers - feasible and acceptable?
  - Patients – ease of use; helpfulness?
- Use findings to modify this new online tool for use in Ontario and Manitoba
Methods

Provider Participation

Provider + staff training on use of Online Tool at clinic ➔ Providers use Online Tool with patients ➔ Provider focus groups and online survey after several months

Patient Participation

Patient uses Online Tool at clinic ➔ Patient completes brief survey after use of Online Tool ➔ Telephone survey with Patient 1 month after use of Online Tool
• Screen everyone

• Affects health on a gradient: There is no health poverty line. Lack of income negatively affects the health of all but the highest-income patients.
Screen Everyone

...but factor in food stamps and the earned income tax credit... and the fact you own the vehicle you live in...

Plus the rollover minutes on your cell phone...

YEP! YOU'RE MIDDLE CLASS.
Benefits Screening Tool

Supporting primary health-care providers in improving the health and income security of patients living in poverty

The Benefits Screening Tool can help you as a health-care provider in recommending income assistance benefits to your patients living on a low income. By asking a series of questions, the tool will generate a list of benefits and resources that your patient...
Benefits Screening Tool

The Benefits Screening Tool can help you as a health-care provider in recommending income assistance benefits to your patients living on a low income. By asking a series of questions, the tool will generate a list of benefits and resources that your patient might be eligible for but may not yet be receiving including more information about how they can qualify and apply.

Let's get started

We have 13 questions for you to ask your patient. This will help us build our recommendations based on your patient's situation. If you don't have enough time to complete the entire questionnaire, not to worry, just answer the two questions on this page, click on the 'Finish' button below and we will provide you with a quick 'Patient Income Benefit Handout'.

Which clinic are you visiting?

- St. Michael's Hospital (Toronto)
- South East Toronto Family Health Team (Toronto)
- South Riverdale Community Health Centre (Toronto)
- Aikins Street Community Health Centre (Winnipeg)
- Klinic Community Health Centre (Winnipeg)
- Mount Carmel Clinic (Winnipeg)
- I am visiting a clinic/family health care center not listed above
- I am not visiting a clinic - I am exploring this tool for informational purposes
Benefits Screening Tool

We need to obtain some more information about your patient

Please tell us more about your patient by answering some additional questions. The more questions that are answered, the more tailored the suggestions will be. However, the patient is not required to complete the survey or answer any question that they are not comfortable responding to. Once you complete this page of the survey, you can continue onto the last page of the survey by clicking on "Continue" at the bottom of this page, should you and your patient choose to do so. Your patient can choose to stop participating in the survey at any time and can still receive benefit recommendations if you click on 'Finish' at the bottom of this page.

What is your citizenship or immigration status? I will read you a list of options and I’d like you to tell me which status best applies to you.

Select option

How old are you?

Select option

What is your employment status? I will read you a list of options and I’d like you to tell me which status best applies to you.

Select option

Are you or anyone in your household living with a physical or mental health disability?
We have recommendations for your patient

Based on the answers that have been provided, the benefit recommendations for your patient are below.

To create a benefits recommendation package for your patient, click the box to the left of the topic name for the benefits of interest. To download and print the package, click on the ‘Download PDF’ button towards the bottom of this page.

Eligibility for some benefits will depend on your patient being eligible for other. For example, if a patient is eligible for the Old Age Security, they may also be eligible for related benefits (e.g., Senior Home Owner Property Tax Grant).

Click:

- / - to show or hide information on additional related benefits your patient may also be eligible for
- or - to show or hide more information on eligibility and how to get the selected benefit

‘Expand all’ to automatically display information on all of the related benefits

‘Collapse all’ to hide all the related benefits information

‘Select all’ to automatically select all the recommended benefits topics

‘Deselect all’ to automatically deselect all the recommended benefits topics

Expand all  Collapse all  Select all  Deselect all

- Manitoba Child Benefit

The Manitoba Child Benefit provides financial assistance to help ensure parents will not lose all support for their children when moving off welfare.

- Manitoba Child Care Subsidy

The Child Care Subsidy Program provides provincial support to eligible families to help with the cost of care by reducing child care fees for children from the ages of 12 weeks to 12 years.
Findings - Providers

• Provider Perspectives
  • Addressing poverty should be central to primary care; address SDOH and not just behaviours

• Across professional designations, physicians are not the optimal staff to use the tool with patients
  • “I’m not sure I’m the best person to be doing this” – MB Physician

• Integration of a new tool into the busy workflow of clinics requires additional supports and resources to see ongoing use with clients
Findings - Patients

- A total of 317 patients used the tool from start to finish in ON and MB
  - Over half of patients who used the tool were from MB
  - 282 responded “Yes” to having trouble making ends meet at the end of the month
Findings - Patients

Total Annual Household Income

Number of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Income</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below $15,000</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,001 - $25,000</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,001 - $35,000</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,001 - $45,000</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$45,001 - $55,000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$55,001 - $65,000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$65,001+</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings - Patients

- Patient Perspectives
  - 80% of patients who used the tool said it was helpful and would recommend it to a friend
  - Most did not describe a change in financial income but indicated benefit from learning through use of the tool
  - Additional guidance and support needed in accessing resources – understanding information including eligibility, time, accessing benefits offices
  - Mixed response on how to make the online tool better:
    - “No problems - I found it very helpful and educating.”
    - “Be more specific in the survey so that there are fewer recommendations that do not apply to my situation”
    - “Use less paper by being able to email me the information”
    - “Make it easier online. Reading level too high.”
FUTURE DIRECTIONS??