

**Marilyn Toft - My comments for 2013.HL21.5 on May 7, 2013 City Council**

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**From:** Axelle Janczur <ajanczur@accessalliance.ca>**To:** "clerk@toronto.ca" <clerk@toronto.ca>**Date:** 5/6/2013 1:51 PM**Subject:** My comments for 2013.HL21.5 on May 7, 2013 City CouncilCITY CLERK'S OFFICE  
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To the City Clerk:

Please add my comments to the agenda for the May 7, 2013 City Council meeting on item 2013.HL21.5, Medically Uninsured Residents in Toronto

I understand that my comments and the personal information in this email will form part of the public record and that my name will be listed as a correspondent on agendas and minutes of City Council or its committees. Also, I understand that agendas and minutes are posted online and my name may be indexed by search engines like Google.

Comments:

May 6, 2013

Dear City Councillors:

**Support for the Board of Health recommendations to City Council on access to care for Medically Uninsured Residents in Toronto**

The Community Health Centres of Greater Toronto - Non-Insured Executive Director Working Group represent 17 Community Health Centres (CHC) across Toronto. CHC's are the only primary health care model in Ontario that, under one roof, combines primary health care services with a wide range of health promotion and community development services. Our staff includes doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers and many other professionals, and combined we serve over 45,000 clients annually.

CHCs have historically been focussed on serving populations that face barriers to accessing both health care and related services, this includes residents who are medically uninsured. Almost 10,000 uninsured individuals are registered as patients with CHCs in Toronto. In urban areas in particular, CHCs have been key providers of services for people with precarious health insurance status, and our work has led to numerous initiatives with health institutions and social services to coordinate access to primary health care services and for enhanced health care system capacity to provide services to those who are medically uninsured. This is an issue that extends beyond the boundaries of Toronto into the GTA – currently CHCs in areas such as Bramalea, Vaughan, and Mississauga are experiencing an increase in demand by non-insured individuals.

We urge City Councillors to **support the recommendations from the Board of Health on Medically Uninsured Residents in Toronto** coming to Council meeting on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

Supporting these recommendations set the tone for the kind of City we want to build, live and work in. A city that says those who are ill have a right to care without fear or crippling debt.

Those in our city living with precarious status contribute to the economy of the city and should have access to critical services. There is no evidence they are medical tourists taking advantage of services, or trying to "take advantage" of Medicare, as has been mythologized by those seeking

to deny such services to non-status individuals. In our CHCs they are, pregnant women seeking maternal care, children with asthma, men who were injured on the job, and seniors dealing with chronic illnesses.

The research evidence tell us that people without health coverage will go to the hospital emergency departments for care and avoid or wait longer than advisable to seek medical treatment, because of fear and inability to pay for care. Those who wait until they receive coverage can compound health care costs. Lack of access to health services, particularly preventative and primary care, result in unmanaged illnesses and over utilization of the emergency rooms, one of the most expensive parts of our health care system and the progression of easily treatable conditions into those requiring expensive inpatient care.

The recommendations from the Board of Health to City Council affirms the fact that increased supports for the uninsured are needed as the need for care exceeds the capacity of the services available, given CHC's are among the few healthcare organizations receiving dedicated funding to treat uninsured residents. Your support for the recommendations will ensure that current levels of services are not eroded, that we strengthen access and support development of capacity with other service providers and levels of governments to respond to needs of non-status residents (e.g. Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Toronto Central LHIN, Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, and hospitals ).

An example of recent erosion is the cuts to Interim Federal Health Program by Citizenship and Immigration, which have greatly reduced or eliminated health coverage for refugees, leaving many who previously had coverage now without. This has created "newly" uninsured for a population that is already greatly in need due to their socio-economic circumstances (e.g. poverty) and swelled the numbers of uninsured. The cost for these "newly" uninsured individuals has been downloaded to the province and CHCs as community-based providers.

We welcome this Board of Health report and support its recommendations and implore you to do the same. The city's Public Health vision is to create "A healthy city for all that reduces health inequalities and improves the health of the whole population." As community-based providers of primary care and support services in your community we ask for your support in making this vision a reality for the uninsured clients in our communities, and we offer our partnership in continuing to strengthen services and make systemic changes on this important public health policy issue.

Sincerely

Axelle Janczur – Co-chair, Community Health Centres of Greater Toronto

Russ Ford – Co-Chair, Community Health Centres of Greater Toronto