

Home Assist: Community- Based Services for Seniors: Hornby Denman Health

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Healthcare Excellence Canada would like to formally acknowledge Hornby Denman Health's generosity in sharing their skills, knowledge, expertise and experiences to inform this promising practice.

About Healthcare Excellence Canada

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At HEC, healthcare excellence means improving safety, quality and value for everyone. It means care grounded in what matters most to patients, caregivers, communities and people in the workforce. It also means care that respects and responds to First Nations, Inuit and Métis priorities and is culturally safe, equitable and supported by the appropriate use of technology. Together with our partners, we embed these foundations across the health system.

Our work also focuses on expanding access to safe, connected, high-quality care closer to home and community. This includes supporting people with primary health care needs and older adults with health and social needs.

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Enabling Aging in Place collaborative

The Enabling Aging in Place collaborative brought together health and social service organizations from across the healthcare continuum to implement promising practices that can delay people's entry into long-term care. The collaborative aimed to improve safety, health and quality-of-life outcomes, while also reducing emergency department visits, lessening demands on care partners and making better use of health and social care resources.

Teams from communities across the country participated in the Enabling Aging in Place collaborative.

Home Assist: Community-Based Services for Seniors

Hornby Denman Health delivers essential community-based supports to help older adults on the islands live independently and manage their own care choices through Community-Based Services for Seniors programs.

Hornby Denman Health supports the ferry-dependent communities of Hornby and Denman Islands. These communities have a strong culture of self-sufficiency, volunteerism and grassroots community support that influence their community members' willingness to engage with formal organizations. Some community members have severed ties with the medical system or are reluctant to interact directly with formal organizations. This makes Hornby Denman Health's strong community-based outreach approach critical to ensuring that all groups receive the support they need to age in place.

In this context, Hornby Denman Health recognizes the need for personalized, non-medical supports such as instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) to help individuals maintain their quality of life through the aging journey. Some of the programs Hornby Denman Health provides include Home Assist, Community Hug Program and Choices in Aging and Dying: Community Nurturing and Education Program.

Key Features

Objectives

The objectives of Home Assist- Community-Based Services for Seniors include:

- To provide enhanced care coordination with centralized, trusted, local support contacts and information packages.
- To provide income-tested support for IADLs to ensure older adults can remain independent in their home as long as desired.
- To provide accessible social and emotional supports for isolated older adults.
- To provide sustainable, flexible, reliable and integrated services that respond to individual and community needs.

Population served

The Home Assist program is available to Islanders, primarily over the age of 65, who may be experiencing underlying medical conditions or social isolation.

The Choices in Aging and Dying: Community Nurturing and Education program focuses on serving younger older adults, caregivers and those not yet experiencing cognitive decline or complex conditions.

Program team

The program team includes the Program Manager–Senior Services, the Care Coordinator, Home Assist Outreach Workers and a Volunteer Coordinator. The Program Manager provides program oversight, hiring, training coordination and key program resource development.

The existing office auxiliary staff of Hornby Denman Health support activities such as bookkeeping, office management and facilities.

Home Assist

The Home Assist program is designed to support older adults with IADLs. This program is of particular importance for Islanders who are not comfortable engaging with the formal healthcare system or are ineligible for funded home nursing services.

Referrals

Client referrals to the program come through:

- self-referrals from individuals and their families
- community members
- local business owners
- local volunteer organizations
- healthcare providers (e.g. Island medical clinics, community paramedics, social service workers, mental health clinicians)

Enrollment and services

The Care Coordinator acts as the primary point of contact for local adults, offering a clear, single point of entry. They are responsible for processing referrals, supporting new clients, creating custom client care schedules and referring clients to other local supports as required. The supports older adults receive often evolve over time. For some individuals, supports begin with accessing transportation to an appointment and, as a trusting relationship is built with staff, the individual becomes more willing to accept additional needed supports to live safely in their community.

Clients receive non-medical support services including:

- housekeeping
- garden assistance
- assistance with firewood
- minor home maintenance
- transportation to essential appointments
- companionship care and friendly visits
- grocery delivery
- help with garbage/recycling

Home Assist Outreach Workers are trusted local members of the community who support clients with IADLs based on the client care schedule and the client's needs and desires of the day.

These workers also provide companionship to individuals with palliative conditions who may not have informal support, as well as for others to provide respite for care partners.

Services provided are flexible to serve older adults at all stages of their aging journey. These services can be deployed rapidly to those with sudden or short-term illnesses, such as after returning home from hospital. They also support older adults over longer periods of time, providing reliable assistance with essential daily tasks, ensuring older adults can remain at home for as long as they choose.

Community Hug Program

The Community Hug program supports transitions and eases connections during the critical period after an individual receives a new diagnosis or is returning home from hospital.

The Community Hug program provides a care package of local goodies, helpful essentials and educational materials and contact information for additional support. The care package is distributed by a trusted neighbour or peer and serves as both a warm welcome home and a critical connection point to the local supports the recipients may not be aware of.

Choices in Aging and Dying: Community Nurturing and Education Program

The Choices in Aging and Dying: Community Nurturing and Education program provides workshops and publicly accessible events about aging, death and dying. These sessions focus on rights, choices and local options for late-in-life care, as well as tools for maintaining

independence. They offer an intimate environment to learn about key topics and provide opportunities for conversations with peers.

This program is designed to connect with younger older adults and encourage earlier conversations and advance care planning. It also aims to build connections between younger older adults and Hornby Denman Health, fostering trust so that in the future these individuals feel more comfortable connecting if they require support.

Implementation context

Hornby Denman Health focuses on equitably serving its rural and remote communities. Many community members live with complexity, including low income and vulnerable housing. Hornby Denman Health works in many complex situations, including offering services in cases where traditional home support services may not be able or willing to. To support these community members, the organization invests in building trusting relationships over time, treating people with dignity, being non-judgemental, ensuring confidentiality, meeting people where they are and adapting services and approaches to the individual. They recognize that it can take a longer time for individuals living with these complexities to trust them and accept support.

Hornby Denman Health's flexible approach ensures that individuals' well-being, safety and dignity are maintained as they are supported to age in their community.

Outcomes¹

Evaluation is an ongoing area of focus for the Hornby Denman Health team as they assess the program, while also balancing doing so in an appropriate way for the populations they support.

Enabling aging in place and delaying entry to long-term care and assisted living

The Home Assist program reduces burden on the long-term care system and reduces the need for subsidized assisted living placements by supporting clients and their care partners.

“I used these times, knowing that she was going to be happy and comfortable with whoever was here, so that I could go and do what I had to do for the household... shopping and this sort of thing.”

– Care partner

The 151 clients Hornby Denman Health supported with IADLs during the collaborative period would have been eligible for either long-term care (LTC) or could meet the criteria for supported living. Of these clients, over 38 percent fall below the guaranteed income security threshold and would have required subsidized placements.

More specifically, Hornby Denman Health supported 18 clients whose families or communities felt they could no longer live safely at home, until the introduction of Home

Assist supports. If these clients had instead been cared for in a LTC home, the average cost per individual would have been \$315.50 per day² based on economic assumption information from the Canadian Institute for Health Information. Further, these individuals would have had to leave their communities, as there are no LTC homes on either Hornby or Denman Island.

Care in the right place and safe transitions

Hornby Denman Health is proud to support clients to age in place until end-of-life or until a safe, planned move is completed.

- 70 percent of the clients who exited the program did so with support and/or in a planned way.
- 68 percent of clients who died did so at home and not in hospital.

These planned and safe transitions, as well as the ability for so many clients to die at home, supports that the care this program provides is enabling people to age and die in their own communities. When individuals have their needs met in their homes and communities, it reduces the need to transfer elsewhere for care and can reduce pressure on emergency departments.

¹ The outcome and impact information shared reflects information available at the time of writing this promising practice. HEC would like to acknowledge that evaluation activities are an ongoing process for many promising practices and

the type of data collected is influenced by program goals, the length of time the program has been implemented and the level of resources available to support evaluation.

² Hospital Spending Series. 23/24. CIHI.

Increased social connections

Hornby Denman Health has supported increased social connections for older adults. Clients have increased the number of different people they see through the program and have also developed deep, trusting relationships with staff and volunteers. After regular visits, staff and volunteers become friendly visitors, who older adults look forward to seeing. The program also facilitates meaningful social interaction by helping people see family and friends through supporting transportation.

Funding

Services are provided on a sliding scale to ensure they are accessible to all eligible community members. Government contracts and grants are used and continually sought by the program team to support program activities and ensure they can support clients as needed.

If you are interested in partnering, supporting or growing the work of Hornby Denman Health, visit their website at hornbydenmanhealth.com.

Asset-Based Community Development Approach

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a strengths-based approach to solving challenges in communities by focusing on and developing the strengths of local assets (e.g. people, physical assets) that are key to ensuring a sustainable community.

The communities of Hornby and Denman Islands are filled with assets and gifts. The remote environment has encouraged a culture where community members know and are open to engaging with their neighbours.

The Hornby Denman Health team has been developing its knowledge and skills related to ABCD, which has supported a different approach to engaging with community members. The team works alongside many community members, groups and associations to support its Community-Based Services for Seniors. For example, when planning education around subjects such as death, dying and end of life planning, the team adapted its approach to respect people's varying levels of comfort with such conversations. The team engaged with known leaders of social organizations, and current and former medical professionals on the Islands to connect independently with their contacts and then share input back to the Hornby Denman Health team.

They consider deeply any real or perceived power imbalances between themselves and community members in engagement activities and take steps to address them. They consider questions such as the following:

- Are they “leading the witness” instead of truly listening to what community members want and need?
- Did community members feel they could be honest and forthcoming or were they worried their answers may impact access to services?

The team’s work to consider and address these power imbalances has led to a more considered approach regarding the questions they ask, and how the questions are framed when they engage with the community.

Hornby Denman Health also acts strongly in the role of a convenor. They bring different associations and groups together to provide opportunities for solutions to be developed by the people most impacted by them. The success they have had in using ABCD approaches to reframe their ways of working is shared in this quote:

“What most comes to mind is the idea of it being a “misuse of power to solve problems that don’t belong to you”. This reframing of our approach has created space for solutions to come from the community rather than our team and has resulted in much more community involvement and participation.”

– Hornby Denman Health team member

The program also continues to celebrate the strengths of community members – with the program supporting older adults who, in turn, are active members of their communities.

“I just can’t tell you how much I appreciate that and how grateful I am for this program of assisting me to be at home. It spurs me on, it wakes me up, it keeps me alive and connected and part of the community.”

– Client

Partnerships

The programs are supported by many partners. The team has nurtured relationships with Denman Island Medical Clinic and Hornby Island Medical Clinic. They regularly work to connect clients with the clinic for routine care. Similarly, Island Health, through the Primary Care Network social worker and home support, provides mutual referrals.

Volunteer and neighbourhood groups and associations have extensive knowledge of the community and often act as trusted community contacts by referring individuals to the programs as well as inform and build what the programs are. Groups such as the Hornby Island Residents and Ratepayers Association, Denman Island Residents Association and Denman and Hornby Island Food Banks act as channels to promote services and receive community referrals.

Other groups, such as Denman Island Cancer Support Group, not only act as trusted peer groups and referral sources, but also have deep knowledge and experience with life-limiting illnesses and navigating the local health network, so act as an information and feedback source. Denman Island Green Burial Society has deep knowledge of end-of-life planning, access to green cemetery and funeral service providers.

Local businesses, including community-based cafes, have strong existing relationships with under-served individuals and offer trusted meeting spaces to hold events, as well as promote services and encourage donations of supplies.

The community-based work that Hornby Denman Health provides through its own services – and that is enriched with the organization’s many community partners – helps people age in place with dignity.

This promising practice was co-produced with Hornby Denman Health. Information was compiled in the fall of 2025. In keeping with the changing and evolving nature of care, the information may change in the future. We encourage you to reach out to this team for any further information that may be helpful as you work to improve care for those you serve.

How can I learn more?

hornbydenmanhealth.com