Toronto abi Network

ENGAGING MEMBERS, *LEADING TOGETHER*

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

Contents

VISION, MISSION + VALUES 3

ENSURING VALUE FOR MEMBERS 4

ADVANCING OUR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 5

PILLAR 1:
Provide and promote seamless client navigation for clients and providers 6

PILLAR 2:
Enhance leadership and collaboration to ensure members and the public have access to resources, education and best practices 8

PILLAR 3:
Lead with a united voice to ensure individuals with ABI receive evidence-based, equitable and quality care 10

2023: QUICK FACTS 12

LOOKING AHEAD 13

MAKING A DIFFERENCE, TOGETHER 14

Vision, Mission + Values

VISION

Influencing excellence in publicly funded services and support for persons living with the effects of an acquired brain injury.

MISSION

To provide leadership in furthering equitable, accessible, responsive, cost-effective and quality publicly funded services and support for persons living with the effects of an acquired brain injury in the Greater Toronto Area.

VALUES

- Quality of Life
- Social Responsibility
- Partnerships
- Research
- Education
- Knowledge-Based Services
- Responsiveness

Ensuring Value for Members

"The ABI Network is committed to meaningful engagement with its members," notes Network Chair Hedy Chandler. "A clear understanding of member priorities and perspectives is essential to our ability to strengthen care, improve the lives of those with ABI, and ultimately affect systemic change."

While the Network always welcomes member feedback, with the pro bono support of consulting firm Optimus SBR (OSBR) for three months in 2023 we did an even deeper dive into our members' viewpoints and most pressing needs. This comprehensive value proposition review and alignment included a member survey and six member focus groups with 38 representatives. Its goal was to assess how members currently perceive the Network's value and recommend how it may be strengthened further.

Based on the feedback they received, OSBR provided member insight into the Networks' current strengths and opportunities for improvement, including a range of short, medium and long-term recommendations for consideration as the Network continues to build upon its value to members.

We are grateful for the participation of all members who engaged in this work and candidly shared their thoughts and insights. The Network has scoped out and looks forward to implementing many of these recommendations over the coming months, in alignment with our strategic directions.

DID YOU KNOW?

83% of members surveyed find the Network's centralized referral and navigation services of most value to their organizations.

Advancing our Strategic Framework

The Toronto ABI Network unites health care and social services organizations to advance a shared goal: strengthening the quality and accessibility of publicly funded services for people with acquired brain injury (ABI).

We are pleased to report on our progress through 2023/24 on key initiatives aligned with the three member-identified pillars of our Strategic Framework:

- Provide and promote seamless client navigation for clients and providers
- Enhance leadership and collaboration to ensure members and the public have access to resources, education and best practices
- Lead with a united voice to ensure individuals with ABI receive evidence-based, equitable and quality care

PILLAR 1

Provide and promote seamless client navigation for clients and providers

Improving access to concussion care

While there are many clinics and resources in Toronto to support individuals with concussion, there has historically been no centralized website to efficiently identify the options that may best meet an individual's needs.

To help and as part of the **Neurotrauma Care Pathways** Implementation Pilot Project, in 2024 the Toronto ABI Network and the **Hull Ellis Concussion and Research Clinic** at Toronto Rehab/UHN launched the **Toronto Concussion Navigator**. This online tool was designed to better enable patients, caregivers and health practitioners to easily find publicly funded, specialized concussion care for adults. To make access easier, it also offers a list of clinics with their eligibility criteria.

The **Toronto Concussion Navigator** was developed with the valuable input of a Lived Experience Committee and refined with user feedback. We are most grateful for their contributions.

> **"Participating in the Concussion Care Navigation Tool Lived Experience Committee was so valuable. I felt like our input as a committee was listened to and incorporated, and that we all had a role in shaping the final outcome into something that will be user friendly.**
>
> **After so many years navigating this health care system, it felt very validating to contribute to something that I know will make a meaningful difference for people with concussions in the future."**
>
> — Lauren, Lived Experience Committee Member

Helping those with ABI find a personal injury lawyer

In June, the ABI Network's revamped **Personal Injury Lawyer Database** celebrated its first anniversary.

Viewed thousands of times to date, the database is a valuable resource for individuals with ABI and their family members, as well as the health care and community service providers who support them. It includes lawyers who serve people across Ontario and allows users to search by category, including lawyers' years of experience, areas served and languages spoken.

The database does not endorse any specific lawyer and is publicly available and free to search. In addition, the Network's website provides **useful tips and information** to help people navigate the often-confusing process of selecting a qualified personal injury lawyer.

> **"The Personal Injury Lawyer Database is a great resource for people seeking a qualified personal injury lawyer with expertise and experience serving clients with brain injury. The option to search by language spoken is incredibly helpful given the diverse needs of our patients."**
>
> — Karen Sasaki, Social Worker
> Toronto Rehabilitation Institute (UHN)

Supporting referrals with mental health / addiction challenges

In principle and in accordance with best practices, all specialized ABI rehab programs should have the capacity to manage patients with ABI who also have mental health/addiction issues. However, given the unique needs of each patient, there may be nuances where admission may need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

To help support acute care and rehabilitation hospitals referring patients with these challenges to inpatient ABI rehab, in 2023/24 the Network developed a **Guidance Document for Transitions from Acute Care to Inpatient Rehab for Patients with Mental Health and Substance Use Issues**. This guide outlines the information required from referring hospitals and includes valuable considerations related to ABI patients who also have mental health or addictions needs.

> **"We know that individuals with mental health and substance use needs face unique barriers to recovery from brain injury. This guidance document recognizes a commitment from acute care and rehabilitation partners to improve equitable access to inpatient services for these patients."**
>
> — Allison Rinne, Care & Transitions Facilitator

PILLAR 2

Enhance leadership and collaboration to ensure members and the public have access to resources, education and best practices

Enhancing understanding of ABI

Given the importance of understanding brain injury, including how it intersects with other aspects of a person's life and the services and supports available to help, Network Referral Coordinator Julie Osbelt frequently presents to a range of system partners.

In 2023/24 Julie presented and co-presented alongside other experts on a number of topics and initiatives, including traumatic brain injury and the criminal justice system, the role of the ABI navigator and system navigation to support ABI-specific care for clients over 65.

Over the coming year, the Network will continue to offer its expertise to help build awareness of and access to the resources, services and supports available to those living with ABI.

Sharing knowledge with our community

In September, the Network co-hosted the 2023 Back to School Conference, *Practical Strategies for Overcoming the Invisible Injury,* alongside Personal Injury Alliance (PIA Law) firms McLeish Orlando, Oatley Vigmond and Thomson Rogers.

The event included speaker tracks on chronic pain, brain injury and wellness, as well as networking opportunities and a presentation of Awards of Excellence in Brain Injury Rehabilitation in collaboration with the Ontario Brain Injury Association. It was a full but productive day, and many participants and delegates indicated it was an informative event.

Improving system flow

In response to feedback received in our member engagement sessions, the Network has initiated a demand to capacity review of ABI rehabilitation services.

The objective of this work is to better understand current state, as well as identify and implement recommendations for improved flow to ensure patients can access the specialized ABI or neurorehab programs they need.

Using knowledge of current utilization, demand, and best practices for ABI rehab, the Network is currently reviewing available baseline data and interviewing programs to better understand access and capacity issues across them. Development of this initiative will continue over the coming year; we look forward to sharing the results with members when it is complete.

Promoting the future of ABI navigation

For two months in 2023, the Network invited a Humber College Systems Navigator Placement Student to support its navigation function. It was the second year we welcomed a student through a placement opportunity, allowing our referral coordinator to lend her expertise and the student to gain firsthand experience in comprehensive service navigation, processing ABI referrals, and other key activities.

"The student placement program is a rewarding one," notes Referral Coordinator Julie Osbelt. "In addition to providing some much-appreciated support, it's an opportunity to promote this essential role to potential future navigators."

In December, Julie co-presented to the 2024 class on the role of system navigation. Going forward, the Network hopes to welcome other students into our work as they contemplate careers in this meaningful specialty.

> **"I understand the role of ABI system navigators more now, particularly their many responsibilities including education, resource navigation, complex case coordination and identification of system gaps and barriers."**
>
> — Christina Tatangelo, Placement Student

PILLAR 3

Lead with a united voice to ensure individuals with ABI receive evidence-based, equitable and quality care

Advocating for supportive housing

The Network continues to partner with City of Toronto officials to find solutions to the challenges people with ABI face in accessing the shelter system.

While shelter spaces are already scarce, accessing them can be even more difficult for individuals living with cognitive impairment from an ABI. Through 2023/24 the Network met with representatives from Toronto Shelter & Support Services to brainstorm ways of addressing this issue – work that continues into 2024/25 as the Network explores a potential pilot project to enhance shelter access for those living with ABI.

In addition, in 2023/24 the Network advocated for approaches to another housing challenge: changes to City housing admission criteria that require applicants to be 59 years of age or older. Noting that individuals living with ABI are typically younger, the Network negotiated a two-year transitional period with the City of Toronto Housing Secretariat. During this time, individuals aged 18 and over may be accepted to vacancies as programs collaborate with the City to relocate to non-seniors buildings.

"We are grateful for the City's partnership in working on solutions to these issues and glad to collaborate with them on next steps," notes Charissa Levy, Executive Director. "Understanding how essential supportive housing is to many living with ABI, we will continue to advocate for appropriate, sustainable housing solutions to meet their needs."

Supporting individuals involved with the justice system

Recognizing that some individuals living with brain injury become involved with the justice system, the Network participates in monthly Community Reintegration Planning Table meetings with the Toronto South Detention Centre. Through this venue, community partners collaborate to support reintegration planning and coordinate services to assist incarcerated males in successfully returning to the community.

The Network also lends its support to the Toronto Regional Human Service and Justice Coordinating Committee, which brings together ABI, addiction, mental health and criminal justice sectors to create personalized solutions for individuals with these complex needs.

Fostering new partnerships in support of mental health

When Network Referral Coordinator Julie Osbelt connected with SCOPE Mental Health Navigator Solmaz Dehghan, they quickly realized their complementary skill sets could be leveraged to support patients even better. Their collaboration led to Julie and Central Region ABI Navigator Cathy Halovanic jointly presenting about their roles in ABI navigation to the SCOPE team on two separate occasions in 2023/24.

It was the start of a new partnership: with the connections between organizations firmly established, the navigators continue to share information, as appropriate, to best support individuals who may benefit from both mental health and ABI services.

"It's been an incredible journey collaborating with Julie and the remarkable ABI navigation team. My first encounter began with a simple case consult, but it soon evolved into something much greater… our team promptly extended an invitation for a presentation, to explore how this program could benefit some of our complex clients."

— Solmaz Dehghan, Mental Health Navigator, SCOPE

2023: Quick Facts

As services for people with ABI are spread across multiple sectors and organizations, there is a significant need for help navigating this aspect of the health care system.

The Toronto ABI Network:

» offers a single point of contact for referrals to rehabilitation and support programs, so service providers can connect their clients with the care and services they need

» brings stakeholders together from across sectors and the ABI continuum to identify and address shared system-level issues

» provides phone support to members, family physicians, individuals with ABI and family members who require information and help finding and accessing programs and supports

DID YOU KNOW?

The top community-based requests received were for case management and clinic services.

In 2023, the Toronto ABI Network:

RECEIVED
849
REFERRALS

to inpatient rehab and clinics, as well as community/outpatient services. Hospitals were the top referral source, followed by physicians.

ANSWERED
1,100
SUPPORT CALLS,

45% of which came from family physicians, community providers and other non-ABI professionals.

SUPPORTED
15
COMPLEX CASES,

providing 15 hours of guidance over **33** phone calls.

Looking Ahead

In addition to launching new initiatives, over the coming year the Network will continue to advance key projects begun in late 2023/24. These include:

Strengthening the navigation and referral process

At present, the Network is partnering with teams from Ontario Health eServices and UHN Connected Care to include the Toronto ABI Network as a referral option on the Ocean e-Referral platform. When complete in the coming months, this enhancement will strengthen the navigation and referral process to access ABI services.

Inspiring through education

Planning for the Network's **biennial conference** is already underway! This much-anticipated multi-track event features sessions that will appeal to the many professionals working with individuals who have sustained a brain injury, as well as survivors and family members living with the effects of ABI.

The 2024 Toronto ABI Conference will take place on December 5 and 6 at the Beanfield Centre, Exhibition Place, Toronto. We look forward to connecting with our many members, partners and participants there.

Making a Difference, Together

Chair: Hedy Chandler

Community Head Injury Resource Services

Acute Care

Mackenzie Health

Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre

Unity Health Toronto/St. Michael's Hospital

University Health Network/Toronto Western

Inpatient & Day Hospital Rehabilitation

Hennick Bridgepoint Hospital/Sinai Health System

Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

University Health Network/Toronto Rehab

West Park Healthcare Centre

Community Service & Support

Community Head Injury Resource Services

Cota

March of Dimes Canada

PACE Independent Living

Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities

Ex Officio

Brain Injury Association of Durham Region

Brain Injury Association of Peel and Halton

Brain Injury Society of Toronto

Brain Injury Association of York Region

University of Toronto

Toronto ABI Network Staff

Charissa Levy, Executive Director*

Jennifer Carr, Administrative Assistant

Julie Osbelt, Referral Coordinator

* Staff shared with the GTA Rehab Network and the Rehabilitative Care Alliance

TORONTO ABI NETWORK

550 University Avenue, Rm 3-102-11

Toronto, Ontario M5G 2A2

P: 416-597-3057

E: info@abinetwork.ca

www.abinetwork.ca