

The Empowerment Council at CAMH (2009)

At the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Empowerment Council (EC) strives to be the voice of clients within the organization. As a body that comprises of individuals that have all had experiences with the mental health and addiction care system, the EC engages in advocacy within the organization and externally.

Within CAMH, the EC conducts systemic advocacy by participating in committees and consultations on behalf of clients' needs. Some achievements as a result of this advocacy have included the establishment of a CAMH Bill of Client Rights, facilitating client engagement in CAMH policies, the education of CAMH partners about the experiences of people have been in the mental health and/ or addiction system, and numerous focus groups.

The EC also promotes self-advocacy with clients by providing information and support. To date, the EC has hosted numerous educational sessions to share information on issues such as employment, patient rights, and mental health and the law for clients of CAMH. EC Addiction Advocacy Worker, David Wong, believes that access to information is essential to self-advocacy. As Wong notes, "The Empowerment Council wants people to empower themselves and know that they have the right to ask questions when receiving treatment". Ultimately, with the best information around rights and care, clients have the tools to make informed choices.

Beyond CAMH, the EC continues its advocacy role by engaging in issues that affect people who access mental health and addiction services. The EC has been known to advocate for changes relating to provincial and federal laws and by addressing the basics in life that people who are accessing CAMH services need. Currently, Wong is working to coordinate a series of client focus groups to inform the provincial government's development of its 10 year mental health and addiction reform strategy. Ultimately, by advocating for changes at the system level the Empowerment Council strives to encourage policies that better support the mental health of the broader community.