

# EXCELERATOR

VHA Home HealthCare's latest developments within our walls and across the communities we serve



## NEW HOARDING SUPPORT WEBSITE

Toronto Hoarding Support  
Services Network launches  
information hub

## VHA PLAYDATE RETURNS FOR 2019

Children with complex medical  
needs experience unique  
opportunity for play

## CLIENTS CONTRIBUTE TO VHA RESEARCH PROJECTS

Clients and caregivers bring new  
research to VHA



# A LETTER FROM VHA'S PRESIDENT & CEO: ONTARIO'S EVOLVING HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

**“The most significant new element in our landscape has been the announcement of a new vision for health care by the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care in Ontario.”**

Dear friends,

Welcome to the Summer 2019 issue of *Excellerator*, VHA Home HealthCare's newsletter sharing updates on the latest developments from within our walls and across the communities we serve.

The most significant new element in our landscape has been the announcement of a new vision for health care by the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care in Ontario. The government is aiming to create a health care system that includes more integrated care, improved patient and service provider experience, an end to hallway medicine in hospitals and improved access to digital tools and virtual care. No one can disagree with these laudable intentions – it's what we all want – the challenge will be in making it happen.

A key element of their strategy involves setting up Ontario Health Teams (OHTs), which the government has defined as groups of providers and organizations that are clinically and fiscally accountable for delivering a full and coordinated continuum of care to a defined geographic population. To put that another way, OHTs will be teams of local health

and community care providers working collaboratively to provide integrated care within their communities. These coordinated provider groups will allow patients, clients and families to more easily access and navigate the system and be better supported through transitions from one provider to another, to have better access to health care records, and to be active partners in care decisions. VHA has worked in close collaboration with a large number of trusted partners for some time and has seen the benefits of integrated interprofessional care and the positive outcomes when clients and their families are truly in the driver's seat ensuring we pay attention to what matters most to them. VHA is well-positioned for this transition and we are optimistic about the improvements this will bring across the continuum of care.

The government is taking a staged approach to these changes. Currently the Ministries are reviewing Self-Assessments completed by organizations who have chosen to work together. They are only expected to approve a small number of OHTs to move forward to the full application at this stage, and we anticipate that decision in the near future. VHA is participating in a number of submissions across the province and we are excited



Carol Annett (left) and VHA’s Vice President of Client Services Barbara Cawley (second from the right) meet with Christine Elliot, Ontario’s Minister of Health (centre) and other Leaders of the East Toronto Health Partners at WoodGreen Community Services to discuss how integrated health care can improve the patient experience by focusing on patients and specific local needs.

about the possibility of being a partner in one or more of the first OHTs to help create a better health system in local communities we are an integral part of. Regardless of whether we are tapped on the shoulder to move forward in this first round of applications, there is good will and great enthusiasm at the tables we are at to forge ahead regardless and keep working together to improve the care experience for all involved—clients and clinicians alike. This work requires heavy lifting, a comfort with ambiguity, a willingness to let go of the past and a heavy dose of trust. As one of our partners put it so well—OHTs will move forward ultimately at the speed of trust amongst partners!

**“[OHTs] will allow patients, clients and families to more easily access and navigate the system and be better supported through transitions from one provider to another, to have better access to health care records, and to be active partners in care decisions.”**

Eventually the plan is to have OHTs in all communities across the province. I have been asked whether I am concerned that VHA is not playing a significant role in all the OHT submissions where we currently provide service. My response has been and remains VHA may well not look like it is today in the years to come, but our creative, skilled and passionate team with their deep knowledge and expertise in home and community care will certainly be needed. For now, our focus is on ensuring our

voices, along with those of our clients and families, are heard as a new future is being reimagined! A transition as significant as this will take time, so I encourage everyone to speak up, fasten your seat belts and get ready for an exciting ride.

The first OHTs are expected to be announced this Fall and we will keep you updated as this progresses. If you would like to read more about the OHTs, the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care have provided detailed information about this process on their website at <http://health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/connectedcare/oht>, and one of the Self-Assessments VHA is involved in is posted on our website at <https://www.vha.ca/vha-home-healthcare-self-asesment-submission-for-ontario-health-team>

We hope you find the pages that follow interesting and engaging. If you have comments about *Exceerator*, or would prefer to receive this news electronically, I encourage you to contact our Senior Communications & PR Manager Tracey Turriff at [tturriff@vha.ca](mailto:tturriff@vha.ca) or 416-280-8426. Please also feel free to contact me with any comments directly at [cannett@vha.ca](mailto:cannett@vha.ca) or 416-482-4609.

Thank you for your interest and enjoy the summer!

*Carol Annett*

President and CEO  
VHA Home HealthCare

# New Hoarding Website Ends the Search for SUPPORT

Looking back, Yvonne Zilber realizes there were signs that she might be prone to hoarding. "I used to collect stamps and coins and put things in groups," she says, but her habits didn't become a problem until after she became sick.

"I suffered a psychological blow and was diagnosed with severe depression and anxiety," she says. "Around that time I started putting more things together, collecting things and doing a lot of buying... the illness was manifesting itself."

Yvonne's daughter explained hoarding to her "and she gave me things to read," says Yvonne. But Yvonne was in denial about her condition, embracing common misconceptions. "I said, 'I'm not a hoarder. I don't have any cats or dogs and my house is clean.' Sure, I had all this stuff in my home but I had a pathway to walk."

Her daughter began looking for help for her mother's problematic hoarding, but she found very little information available about services in Toronto. "She looked for a long, long time," says Yvonne, who was eventually enrolled in a hoarding study at Sunnybrook Hospital.

In April, to address the challenge community members face when seeking support, 16 community agencies that comprise the Toronto Hoarding Support Services Network (THSSN) launched a website with funding from the City of Toronto.

The site—[www.torontohoardingnetwork.ca](http://www.torontohoardingnetwork.ca)—provides Torontonians with a one-stop information portal for hoarding support. It delivers clear information about hoarding to reduce the stigma around the disorder and provides information about supports and services that are available in the city, filling a critical information gap identified by service providers and people with hoarding behaviours.



Now a recognized clinical diagnosis, hoarding is a significant problem in Toronto. The compulsive desire to collect items can lead to injury, collapsing floors, infestations, and fire hazards, and can put people at risk of eviction. "Hoarding is a complex condition. It is often the symptom of other underlying causes, so various supports are needed, such as mental health, public health and housing services," says Trudy Huet, Chair of the THSSN and a staff member at VHA Home HealthCare, the lead organization on the network. "Working together, we can offer a



Trudy Huet (left) and Yvonne Zilber (right) work together to clean and declutter Yvonne's kitchen.

more effective, coordinated response. And the new website will enable us to help even more people."

Through support from the Sunnybrook program, Yvonne was able to take control of her hoarding behaviours. "I started to understand it and accept that I had [hoarding behaviours]. Then I was able to accept the help."

For service providers, the hoarding website is helping to build capacity and share knowledge to address hoarding in the city. For people living with the condition, their loved ones, and others in the community who are interested in learning more about hoarding, the website's online assessment tools, downloadable supports, helpful videos and links to resources and support services are increasing awareness of the condition and helping reduce the stigma surrounding people who hoard.

Yvonne felt this work was so important that she joined the Network herself to help build understanding about people with lived experience of hoarding. "After therapy I still think I suffer with the disorder but I have awareness now, and that's why the THSSN is so important. A lot of people suffer and this is bringing education into the community now. People can talk about it and get help," she says.

You can read more about Yvonne's story and media coverage of the hoarding website by CBC, CTV, *The Toronto Star* and more at <https://www.vha.ca/media>.

Watch a video about the hoarding network and website here: <https://www.vha.ca/new-hoarding-support-website-fills-critical-information-gap-and-provides-needed-support-for-torontonians/>

# VHA Caregivers Nominated by Clients for Excellence in Care: Meet the Winners of VHA's 2019 Client Choice Awards

Every day, VHA caregivers create opportunities for more independence for the clients they serve. We always encourage clients to tell us about the care they receive, and each year we invite clients to nominate caregivers who have done an exceptional job for VHA's Client Choice Awards. This year, the response was once again overwhelming with over 200 nominations, full of stories of extraordinary efforts and tremendous passion and commitment. Here are some comments from clients about our winners:

**Amleset Tewelde:** "Amleset eases the burden of stress for me," says Claudette. "When Amleset enters the room, she brings joy," adds Malcolm.

**Carmen Villatoro:** "Sometimes my mom doesn't want Carmen to leave, she wants her to stay, as if she was another daughter," says Maha.

**Chandra Naipaul:** "Once the door opens and Chandra comes in, Evangelia thinks the sun came up," shares Nic.

**Kaila Jonsen:** "In my heart, Kaila is like a daughter. I never had somebody care for me as much as she has cared for me," expresses Sue-Ellen.

**Maria Reyes:** "Maria is a God-send to us," says Adel. "When she is around I feel that my mom is in safe hands," he adds emotionally. "Out of one to ten she is an 11."

**Meghan Lloyd:** "My grandmother has trouble with her language, so Meghan takes the time to speak with her in a really positive and dignified way that she can understand," says Ronald.

**Richie Molo:** "Many of our clients are sad or depressed. Richie takes her time to listen to their stories, because behind them is the real person," says Lily, a Registered Physiotherapist at VHA.

**Regat Ogbasilasie:** "Regat is just an absolute joy...She's the most wonderful woman and we are thrilled to have her in our lives and we hope we keep her forever as a friend," expresses Janice. She and her husband Dennis call Regat 'the Queen of all Africa' because of her kindness and generosity.

**Roderick Que:** "Roderick provided my wife and myself with the confidence that we could manage her care at home. He wasn't just taking care of Sue, he was taking care of our family, and that made a huge difference," shares Peter.

**Uma Sud:** "The moment my daughter Abigail saw Uma, my heart melted. Just the way Uma talks to Abigail, holds Abigail, walks around with Abigail... what else could I ask for," says Charlene.

You can watch heartwarming videos of the award-winners at <http://bit.ly/2019ClientChoice>



## VHA Occupational Therapist Helps School to Win Innovative Exemplary Practice Award

Sarah Chaudhery is an Occupational Therapist with VHA Home HealthCare who works with number of schools, including St. Bernard Catholic School, a special school in the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) that has 20 pupils on the autism spectrum and no specialized programming. Last year, the school decided to try to secure funding to build a Sensory Room—a first within the TCDSB—and the principal at St. Bernard reached out to Sarah for her help.

"I was contacted by the principal to assist with the application for funding," explains Sarah. "I reached out to my team at VHA and received good ideas and examples to develop the submission." With Sarah's help, St. Bernard became the first school to receive this type of funding.

"I assessed a group of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and provided reports to the school board

indicating why the equipment was justified and how the sensory room would benefit them. Then I worked with each student for a block of treatment visits," explains Sarah.

In recognition of this exciting initiative, St. Bernard was awarded the Innovative Exemplary Practice Award by the TCDSB for its Sensory Space, along with additional funding to add to the space. Sarah was recognized as part of the winning team for her contributions. "It was so thoughtful of St. Bernard to recognize me and VHA as part of their team," says Sarah. "Thank you to my co-workers at VHA for talking me through this process and thank you and congratulations to St. Bernard!"



# HOW CLIENT PARTNERS ARE HELPING TO GUIDE RESEARCH AT VHA



VHA's Director of Research Dr. Sandra McKay (centre) stands with Research Associates Arlinda Ruco (left) and Sonia Nizzer (right) as part of VHA's Change Day Ontario event after winning Group Pledge in 2018 for their research pledges.

Sonia Nizzer is a Research Associate at VHA and is the primary contact for client partners who are working with VHA's Research team on projects to help clients and their caregivers. VHA tries to involve clients' voices in every aspect of our work, and the Research team has made this an important priority.

"We see the impact client and caregiver involvement has had on other initiatives and areas of VHA. We want to involve them in our research work so we can ensure the end products of our initiatives are the most suited for clients and caregivers," says Nizzer.

Research projects have long been directed by academic institutions or large governing bodies making the decisions about what should be explored and what questions need to be answered. "We want to engage clients in helping to direct

the research at VHA. We are in a unique position being so close to patient care in home health care that we have the opportunity to reach out to our clients and caregivers to ask for their help in guiding our research," adds Nizzer.

One example of this client engagement is the PhotoVoice study called The Little Things. Client partners were involved from the very beginning helping to shape this project that explored the perceptions and experiences of client and family-centered care through photographs by families with children with complex medical needs. "For the PhotoVoice study, a client partner helped to write the initial proposal and was involved in decisions regarding how to conduct the research throughout the project," shares Nizzer. "This is ideally how we would like to conduct all of our projects, co-designing with client partners along each step of the process, and that is what we are working towards."

Client partners get involved with research in a number of ways. Members of VHA's Client Partner Advisory Council have expressed interest in working with the Research department and have helped to hire new members of the Research team. Other client partners have been involved in making decisions regarding VHA's Junior Researcher Development Award as well as our internal fellowship program. "Client partners review the applications alongside the Research staff members. We discuss the applications and make decisions together," Nizzer says, "We see this as a very collaborative process with client partners having an equal voice to our staff members. In this way, client partners are playing a key role in directing the focus and shape for our research going forward."

"Some clients have told us they thought research would be intimidating and would involve confusing language. We are working to bring down those barriers as much as possible. We want people to feel comfortable participating and to be excited about research. When clients who have never been involved in a research project before tell us what a positive experience it has been, that feels great and makes us feel we are doing something well. We know how much client partners have to contribute due to their lived experience."

A new project VHA Research is working on with client partners is called Parent Home Hacks. The website [www.parenthomehacks.com](http://www.parenthomehacks.com) is a resource VHA is developing with client partners who are parents of children with medical complexities. The site is intended to be a hub for parents to share 'hacks' that they've created at home to solve practical care challenges for their children. You can read more about this website on page 7 of *Excelerator*.

VHA's Research team is always looking for more client partners to participate in various projects. If you're interested in becoming a research client partner or getting involved with research at VHA, contact [researchhelp@vha.ca](mailto:researchhelp@vha.ca).

## IN MEMORIAM: FRANCES SILVERMAN

Frances Silverman joined the Research Advisory Committee in 2016 as a client partner. As a distinguished professor and well-respected scientist at the University of Toronto, Frances' insight as a caregiver and researcher was instrumental in the development of VHA's Research Fellowship Program and Junior Researcher Development programs. Frances passed away in December of 2018.

Aside from contributing her time to developing VHA studies, Frances cared for her partner who received home care services from VHA for many years.

Thank you Frances. We will miss you.



## CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

Harold Fortis, one of VHA's research client partners, has been the shining star on many recent research initiatives. Harold became connected with VHA when his daughter received services due to her complex medical needs. VHA provided nursing, personal support and wound care for her. These were lifesaving for Harold's daughter and greatly improved her quality of life.

A few years ago, Harold attended a research advisory meeting presenting VHA's Strategic Research Vision and the department's five-year strategic priorities. "I was fascinated by the process of the Research team moving through the earlier years of visibility and support in 2009, to collaborating with partners in 2015, and ultimately to driving solutions in 2020. I decided I wanted to play a role," shares Harold.

Recently, Harold was part of the hiring panel for a new Research Manager for VHA. Harold wanted to ensure the new team member would allow the department to grow and become even more collaborative. His overall goal working with the Research team has been to help raise their profile, to support their long-term vision, and to remove any stigma around the word and idea of 'research', to make sure it is accessible and that VHA's research projects are making a valuable contribution.

"Joining VHA's research team has been quite rewarding for me," says Harold. "There is never a dull moment as you work through the ever expanding list of projects, funding, and partnerships, all in an effort to raise VHA's profile and impact."

# Necessity is the Parent of Invention

For parents who have children with medical complexities, even the simplest tasks can pose real challenges to complete. These moms and dads aren't just resilient, they're also incredibly creative with the solutions they develop to make day-to-day living easier and more comfortable for their kids and, sometimes, also for themselves as caregivers. VHA client and carer partners were talking about these caregiving "tricks", and that led to the idea for Parent Home Hacks—an online community that encourages the sharing of home and life hacks among families of children with medical complexities.

"The concept for [parenthomehacks.com](http://parenthomehacks.com) actually came directly from a client partner who said, 'hey, I've got all these great solutions for parents facing the same challenges as me, I want to share them!'" says Sonia Nizzer, VHA's research associate and site administrator. "The research further confirmed that this kind of information sharing is not only practical, but also crucial to helping parents feel more connected and less isolated," she adds.

"As a parent who cared for a child with complex medical needs for over 16 years, I was pretty much left on my own to figure things out regarding day-to-day life hacks," says Stacey Ryan, VHA's Client and Carer Liaison. "Unless you're independently wealthy, you have to get creative because buying all the equipment and modifying every inch of your home can be incredibly expensive. As our daughter got older, for example, bathing her on the second floor of our older home became impossible," Ryan notes. As they waited for the completion of their accessible condo build, they didn't want to invest a lot of time or money in a temporary solution. Their hack? "We bought a \$20 inflatable pool, parked it in the



living room and bathed her there," says Ryan. "It would have been great to have Parent Home Hacks to share this kind of information with and also search up other solutions," she adds.

"This is the first site of its kind in the world that we know of specifically aimed at sharing the hacks of parents and guardians of children with medical complexities. We're facilitating something that we heard from parents was needed and would be valuable," says Dr. Sandra McKay, VHA's Director of Research. VHA plans to grow the community and the database of hacks by engaging with caregiving circles at children's hospitals to help spread the word about the site.

The solutions on [parenthomehacks.com](http://parenthomehacks.com) will cover the spectrum from simple 'hacks' to help with sleep or bathing, to more complex, targeted responses to unique challenges for specific circumstances. Hacks can be posted by any parent directly on the site and are then vetted by the administrator and added into the database. Parents can also share as much (or as little) as they'd like about their own circumstances and their children's condition. Hacks are searchable and filterable by categories such as school, bedroom, stairs, etc. "Our focus ultimately is on the impact we can make by connecting people, their ideas and in building a global community that is, in many ways, still incredibly isolated," says Nizzer. "It's an exciting opportunity to bring these parents together and support them in their daily lives as caregivers."

Visit [www.parenthomehacks.com](http://www.parenthomehacks.com) to search ideas, add your own, or share with a caregiving community to help parents of children with complex medical needs.



# Failing *Intelligently* to Succeed

New ideas and insights rarely turn into successful outcomes on the first try. Technology disrupts. Markets change. Failure happens.

With this in mind, VHA invited Ashley Good, the CEO and Founder of Fail Forward to share her expertise with a diverse group of staff about how to fail intelligently to succeed. Good helps diverse businesses, governments, funders, and non-profits—including Engineers Without Borders and the United Nations Environment Program—to harness their failures to learn, innovate, and build resilience.

The workshop at VHA explored what intelligent failure means and discussed how to create a team culture where learning and innovation thrive. Attendees left all their failure baggage at the door, and exchanged them for tangible skills, insights and actions to help them “fail forward.”

“Most of us have a tendency to mask failures or ‘blame’ ourselves. Either way, these responses aren’t really effective for learning,” says Pam Stoikopoulos, VHA’s Head Solutions Strategist and organizer of the session. “I think the workshop really helped people learn how to frame failures more constructively, so that they change what they’re doing to ultimately succeed. It’s this kind of iterative approach that’s so critical to an innovative mindset,” she adds.

## What does intelligent failure look like?

To fail intelligently you need to go through a loop of fails, learnings, risk taking and innovation. Failing “forward” means:

- Learning from these mistakes and persevering.
- Analyzing and communicating shortcomings in a way that maximizes learning.
- Talking about fails in a productive way and without judgement.
- Asking ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions to create curiosity and better focus on learning instead of ‘why’ and ‘who’ questions which can take on a more accusatory tone.
- Taking risks and using learnings as guidelines for new innovation.
- Remembering that magic happens outside of people’s comfort zone.
- Not being afraid to fail again.

Good’s mantra is really to fail forward by acknowledging mistakes will be made, examining them to tease out lessons learned and continuing to take calculated risks to improve and innovate.

For more information visit [www.failforward.org](http://www.failforward.org).

Ashley Good (left) begins her workshop by asking participants what intelligent failure means to them.





# VHA Playdate

returns for 2019!

Veronica Karakosidis sits in the school gym watching her twin boys play. Like most eight-year-olds, Sammy and Frankie are “happy, busy, non-stop little guys—very cute,” says their proud mom. “They just want to play.” The twins are not entirely typical kids though. Sammy and Frankie have Angelman Syndrome, a nervous system disorder that can affect speaking, balance, movement, and intellectual development, and can cause seizures and sleep problems.

Sammy and Frankie get to play with other children in a worry-free setting during Playdate.



But today, Sammy and Frankie get to play just like other kids, thanks to the Playdate program created by VHA Home HealthCare. Playdate gives children with complex medical needs a rare and much-needed opportunity to socialize, play and just have fun as all kids should—with the supervised support of skilled caregivers who are trained to work with medically fragile children.

“The special thing about the Playdate program is that it provides nursing and personal support for these children—because their complex medical needs must be looked after whether they are at play programs, at home or at school,” says Kathryn Nichol, Vice President of Quality, Best Practice, Research and Education and Chief Nursing Executive at VHA. The program is especially valuable for older youth who no longer qualify for most children’s programs, giving them the opportunity to socialize and engage in activities they would not otherwise be able to do.

Playdate is the result of a collaboration between VHA and client and caregiver partners who are parents of children with complex medical needs—one of VHA’s priority areas. Listening to the client voice to co-develop the program



ensured that Playdate would meet the unique needs of these families.

“The parents told us there are no play programs that are appropriate for their kids because of the nursing and personal support that’s required,” says Nichol. With Playdate, for six consecutive Saturdays, children in the program can take part in activities that support their gross motor needs, as well as arts and crafts, meeting and learning about exotic animals, playing with a therapy dog, and other activities. “It’s really a wonderful opportunity for kids to play and relax,” adds Nichol.



Therapy dog Cookie was brought in for the Spring 2019 session of VHA Playdate. She was a hit with the kids!

Playdate also benefits the childrens’ families. The careful supervision provided at the program allows parents to have a few hours of available time to run errands or simply have some time to themselves, which is generally quite rare for these families. “I know the twins are safe and taken care of at VHA’s Playdate and I get a nice break,” Karakosidis says. “I mean... who [else] is going to watch my kids? Nobody trusts themselves to watch them. They think you need to be specialized. But the VHA ladies... they are amazing. We’re so lucky.”

Jas Marwaha, whose son Sahib is in the program, concurs. “He’s very happy when he comes here. He’s ready for Playdate. It’s a great program.”

“When we started the program, we knew we wanted to make Playdate available for free because we know the cost of having a child with complex medical needs is significant,” says Nichol. “We don’t want to burden these families more than they are already burdened.”

The 2019 Spring and Fall Playdate sessions have been made possible by generous funding from the Emajjin Children’s

Foundation. The foundation selected Playdate as the beneficiary of its 2018 annual fundraising gala last October. The event raised enough money to cover two programs—one in April/May and another to come in October/November.

VHA is actively looking for sustainable funding for Playdate, which is not currently funded by the government. “We wish this was an ongoing program, especially for children who age out of school programs and really have very few organized programs that have medical support associated with them,” says Nichol. Playdate’s operational costs are relatively small, such as renting the venue and purchasing some supplies and entertainment. “The majority of the cost is ensuring the right nurses and trained personal support workers are on hand to support the children.”

For now, says Nichol, “We are relying on a variety of sources for donations and philanthropy.” Veronica hopes someone will come forward to make the philanthropic investment. “At Playdate, [my sons] get a lot of support and people with energy, which I don’t always have,” she laughs. “It is a fun place for them, it’s safe, and I get a nice break. I never worry if they are going to hurt themselves or hurt someone else. Please continue this program!”

Visit <http://bit.ly/PlaydateSpring2019> to see the Playdate families in action and learn more about the program. For more information about the Emajjin Children’s Foundation, please visit [www.emajjin.org](http://www.emajjin.org).



Sahib creates a Mother’s Day gift with the help from a VHA PSW during a Playdate session in May.



Stay proud! VHA marched in the **Toronto Pride Parade** as an ally to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Two-Spirit community!

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