

New Brunswick Health Council - Frequently asked questions

Q: What is the New Brunswick Health Council and what is its mandate.

The New Brunswick Health Council is a Part 3 public body created by the Government of New Brunswick to promote and improve health system performance. It has a two-part mandate. The first is to engage citizens in ongoing dialogue about important health system performance issues in order to provide recommendations to the Minister of Health and to bring the citizen/patient experience back to service providers and policy makers in a way that is objective, scientific and as useful as possible. The second involves measuring, monitoring and reporting on health system performance to both the public and the health system partners. Together, these two streams of activity will contribute to greater accountability, improved health system performance, and promotion of a more citizen-centered health care system.

Q: How will having a Health Council be helpful to New Brunswickers?

A: The council will provide a formal, arms-length mechanism to facilitate, promote and support ongoing citizen engagement in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of New Brunswick's health-care system. It will provide New Brunswickers with objective, credible information about the performance of the health-care system. By developing standardized approaches to measuring and comparing performance across different areas of the province and nationally, the Health Council will help stakeholders to identify areas where improvements in health system performance are possible.

Q: How will having a council improve quality within the health system?

A: Monitoring, measuring and reporting on health system performance are essential steps in improving quality. By developing and implementing standardized and comparable measures of system performance, it will be possible to identify areas needing improvement. Best practices will also be able to be identified through this process.

Q: Is the New Brunswick Health Council similar in its mandate and scope to councils in other provinces?

A: The New Brunswick Health Council's mandate to monitor and report on the performance of the health-care system is similar to the role that health councils play in other jurisdictions. However,

the New Brunswick Health Council's citizen engagement mandate is considerably stronger than the public consultation role of other health councils.

Q: What resources will the council have to complete its mandate?

A: The Health Council will have a number of staff to support its mandate to engage citizens and report on the performance of the health services system. In addition, it will have resources to conduct citizen engagement activities and to support performance measurement activities. The Health Council will also be able to use a significant amount of information that is already collected and reported by the Department of Health, the Regional Health Authorities and other agencies, such as Statistics Canada and the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

Q: Who does the council report to?

A: The council reports to the Minister of Health. The council will also be expected to report as required to the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Q: How does the council differ in its mandate from the Office of the Auditor General?

A: There are some similarities in the mandate of the council and the Office of the Auditor General. Both promote accountability by providing objective information to the people of New Brunswick. The Office of the Auditor General has a broad mandate that covers all government departments and tends to focus on analyses that relate to value for money. The Health Council will focus exclusively on health system performance and have a unique citizen engagement mandate that has no parallel in the Office of the Auditor General.

Q: What is citizen engagement?

A: Citizen engagement is decision-makers and citizens working together through deliberation to solve problems, make decisions and take action to address problems. It is a partnership between decision makers and citizens to share responsibility to solve issues or make decisions. It is mostly focused on citizens and less on interest groups, lobbyists, stakeholders and experts.

Q: Is citizen engagement similar to a complaint mechanism?

A: The Health Council's citizen engagement mandate does not include a formal complaint mechanism. The Health Council will have no power to inquire into individual complaints nor to act as a mediator with respect to individual complaints – this will continue to be the role of the

Ombudsman. The Health Council's citizen engagement mandate is oriented towards public policy, program design and broad service delivery issues. The Health Council does not act as an advocate but rather as an independent monitor of health system performance in order to focus on system improvement.

Q: Is citizen engagement a form of public consultation?

A: Citizen engagement goes beyond conventional public consultation by enabling citizens to do more than simply voice an opinion – it also allows them to participate in the deliberation process leading to decisions.

Q: How can citizens request the Health Council to address a particular issue? Is the Health Council's agenda grassroots' driven or top down?

The Health Council's agenda will be annually planned and decided on through a consultation process involving the council, the Minister of Health and the RHAs. Citizens can influence the council's agenda by identifying relevant issues either to the council directly through council members or other citizen engagement processes or by identifying issues to the Minister or RHAs. Based on input and consultation from these sources, the council will develop an annual work plan which will be presented to the Minister for approval.

Q: What type of issues could the Health Council address through a citizen engagement process?

A: The Health Council could initiate a citizen engagement process to address any type of health system performance issue where broad public input would be helpful in clarifying issues and concerns or making decisions among a number of possible alternative solutions. Some examples include the selection of meaningful performance indicators, population satisfaction with health care delivery, establishment of priorities for the health system, patient safety issues and service quality concerns.

Q: What criteria will the council use to decide whether or not to hold a citizen engagement process?

A: A citizen engagement process could be initiated if there is a likelihood that citizen engagement will contribute to identifying realistic policy options. Conversely, if there is only one way to solve an issue, there may be little additional benefit in holding a citizen engagement process when the final decision is already clear.

Q: What makes a citizen engagement process successful?

A: Success is achieved through:

- Clear goals and clear expectations of the citizen engagement process.
 - Clarifying the process so that everyone understands what is negotiable, what will happen with the recommendations, how much weight citizens' engagement has in the decision-making process.
 - Ensuring legitimacy by having a good representation of the population and different interests.
 - A flexible approach -- there is no "one model fits all." Processes must be adapted to allow meaningful participation and the development of sound recommendations that will result in sufficient acceptance so the decision can be implemented successfully.
 - Transparency and accountability in all aspects of the citizen engagement process, including keeping the larger public (outside participants) well informed.
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Q: What are the citizen engagement models that could be used?

A: Here are some examples of citizen engagement models:

- Deliberative Forums: this process was used for Dialogue on Health in the Acadian Peninsula;
 - Consensus Conference: Almost similar to Dialogue on Health except fewer participants (around 25 or more) who have greater input on the process (which experts to consult, etc.) and the agenda and tend to have more meetings.
 - Planning Cells: Includes hundreds of participants at multiple sites (one site per planning cell). Participants at each planning cell deliberate on issues and try to find solutions. At the end, reports from all cells are integrated into a final report and participants from all planning cells approve the final report. Once the final report is approved, it is handed to decision makers.
 - Citizen's Jury: A committee of approximately 25 people provided with a specific mandate. A citizen's jury is responsible for setting its own agenda, obtaining the information and meeting with experts in order to fulfill its mandate.
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Q: What is performance measurement?

A: Performance measurement and monitoring is the on-going, systematic process of collecting, analyzing and using information to assess and report on progress in meeting expected results. Performance measurement can occur at a program level, an organizational level and a system level. Measures can provide information about processes within the health-care system as well as the outcomes being achieved. Performance measurement provides information to guide decision making and to support making adjustments to ensure desired results are achieved.

Performance reporting is the process of communicating evidence-based performance information; performance reporting supports decision making, accountability and transparency.

Q: How will the Health Council measure the performance of the health system?

A: The Health Council will measure the performance of the health system in a variety of ways. Depending on the specific area that is to be researched, the Health Council may use existing information or it may collect and analyze new information. It will determine the specific measures to use to assess the health system's performance, based on the areas or issues prioritized for research. There may be some measures reported consistently year after year and there may also be measures established to assess a specific area that has been identified by the Health Council or one of its stakeholders.

Q: How will results be reported?

A: Performance measurement results will be reported to the Minister of Health, who will be responsible for releasing the information to the public. The Health Council will produce an annual report to provide information to the public and other stakeholders on the performance of the health system.