



National Collaborating Centre
for Determinants of Health

Centre de collaboration nationale
des déterminants de la santé

LEARNING TOGETHER: A LEARNING CIRCLE APPROACH FOR POPULATION HEALTH STATUS REPORTING



This document summarizes the learning circle approach for the National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH) Population Health Status Reporting Initiative. The NCCDH is using this approach to bring together health sector stakeholders from across Canada, and strengthen the integration of social determinants and health equity in population health status reports and reporting processes.

WHAT IS A LEARNING CIRCLE?

A learning circle (also known as a study circle) is a cooperative way of learning that is based on natural patterns of human interaction¹. It consists of a series of discussions, demonstrations and presentations through which members share their experiences, generate new knowledge and apply new skills. Learning circles are not a new concept. They have been around since the earliest people sat down around a circle to share experiences and solve problems.

Learning circles are a form of experiential education that can be used to address everything from local neighborhood issues, health professional education, and even a complex topic such as poverty. As a result of interactive discussions, a learning circle may make recommendations or decisions. Unlike an advisory committee, which consists of a group of experts that provides advice on a specific issue, a learning circle includes a diversity of individuals with a wide range of experience and expertise. Each member

To learn more about the NCCDH Population Health Status Reporting Initiative visit our website at www.nccdh.ca

provides a unique perspective that will contribute to the learning circle discussions and activities. All learning circle participants share a key characteristic: a joint interest in the subject being examined.

WHO IS PART OF A LEARNING CIRCLE?

Learning circles usually consist of 5 to 15 individuals from a variety of backgrounds. The learning circle for the Population Health Status Reporting Initiative involves frontline public health practitioners, medical officers of health, policy analysts, public health managers and researchers involved in some aspect of population health reporting. This circle includes representatives from different public health/health authority structures and various parts of Canada.

HOW DO LEARNING CIRCLES WORK?

There is no one correct way to run a learning circle. Depending on the topic and participants, the goals and operation of a learning circle may vary. In this case, the learning circle has been built around a series of relatively short meetings. The first meeting endeavors to establish a schedule, which serves to direct the work of the learning circle for future meetings. At each meeting members identify key issues and challenges associated with the topic and at subsequent meetings study these issues / questions. Learning circles use a facilitator to guide the group through the discussion.

The Population Health Status Reporting Initiative has set up the Learning Circle to follow a cycle of 2-hour teleconference conversations every 2-3 months.

THE BENEFITS OF A LEARNING CIRCLE APPROACH

A learning circle is a method for engagement that helps gain new understanding of an issue. The work of our learning circle will not only provide participants with an opportunity to help support the development of a population health status report at Capital Health (Halifax, Nova Scotia), it will also allow participants to bring learnings back to their own organizations. Participants will also be able to share new knowledge regarding population health status reporting methods and tools with other public health organizations in Canada.

This approach may be a new undertaking for many learning circle members, and hopefully this experience will serve as an opportunity to develop new relationships, share ideas and experiences, and brainstorm new solutions. And ultimately, the experience of this learning circle will contribute to the work that the participants and others in Canada are doing to re-orient health systems in Canada and address health inequities in their own jurisdictions.

LEARNING CIRCLE EXAMPLE

As previously mentioned, learning circles have been used by a variety of organizations in different ways to address an array of topics. The Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement (www.tamarackcommunity.ca) has developed a Government Learning Circle that allows all levels of government to come together to learn how they can play a key role in helping to reduce poverty through collaboration with business leaders, volunteer organizations and citizens at the local level. To learn more about this initiative, visit the Tamarack Vibrant Communities Government Learning Circle website at: www.tamarackcommunity.ca/g3s61_VC_051906.html.

REFERENCE

1. MacGregor A. (1993). Transformation and Tribal Learning. Burnaby, British Columbia: Open Learning Agency.

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La version française est également disponible au : www.ccnds.ca sous le titre *Apprenons ensemble: Une approche fondée sur le cercle d'apprentissage aux fins de rapports sur l'état de santé des populations*