



National Collaborating Centre
for Determinants of Health

Centre de collaboration nationale
des déterminants de la santé

LEARNING TOGETHER: ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY FOR HEALTH EQUITY ACTION INITIATIVE: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION



This document summarizes the National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH) Organizational Capacity for Health Equity Action Initiative.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY FOR HEALTH EQUITY ACTION INITIATIVE

The Organizational Capacity for Health Equity Action Initiative — later referred to as OCI or organizational capacity initiative — is a participatory initiative designed to teach about frameworks, strategies and organizational conditions that are most relevant to develop and sustain Canadian public health organizational capacity for health equity action.

OBJECTIVES OF THE INITIATIVE

1. Identify and assess approaches to effectively build organizational capacity for health equity and social determinants of health action.
2. Support practice sites to pilot and assess mechanisms to strengthen organizational capacity for health equity/ social determinants of health action.
3. Share learnings from the initiative to contribute to the evidence base and support public health practice.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Based on participatory learning and using resulting resources, at the end of the initiative, public health practitioners and organizations will be able to:

1. describe components of organizational capacity needed to enable health equity action;
2. understand the organizational enablers and barriers to health equity action; and
3. identify tools to support health equity-oriented organizational capacity.

In the long term, the NCCDH anticipates that the lessons and tools provided will be used by public health organizations to develop and improve the “knowledge, skills, commitment, structures, systems and leadership”¹ to make change activities to support action to improve health equity.

DEFINITION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Organizational capacity for health equity action is the “ability of an organization to identify health inequities, mobilize resources, and take effective action to reduce inequities and promote health equity.”² This requires that organizations develop the necessary “knowledge, skills, commitment, structures, systems, and leadership”¹ for effective action.

THE HOST

This project is being led and facilitated by the NCCDH in collaboration with practice site participants. The NCCDH supports public health to understand and address social determinants of health and to advance the equity of health opportunities and outcomes. As the host, the NCCDH provides resources and support to the learning circle (described below) and practice sites.

PARTICIPATORY LEARNING

The initiative uses a participatory learning approach through a [learning circle](#)³ and practice sites.

LEARNING CIRCLE

A [learning circle](#) is a series of group discussions to help learners generate new skills. The learning circle integrates evidence, expert opinion and practice-based innovation and learning. The NCCDH piloted this strategy in a 2012 initiative to identify and promote mechanisms to integrate [health equity into health status reporting](#).⁴ The [developmental evaluation findings](#) of that project indicated that a learning circle was a useful approach to confirm and generate new knowledge, foster relationships among participants and support implementation at an organizational level.⁵

The OCI learning circle is composed of practitioners and researchers with knowledge and experience in organizational capacity and health equity, including representatives from practice sites. Circle members represent:

- four public health organizations, spanning the provincial, regional and local levels;
- four universities;
- a municipality;
- the International Union of Health Promotion and Education; and
- the NCCDH.

The circle members identify key organizational capacity issues and challenges and study these issues throughout the course of the initiative.

The learning circle meets every quarter for two hours via webinar. An early in-person meeting was held to support the development of a relationship between circle members. Each facilitated circle meeting includes a brief presentation with highlights from an evidence backgrounder followed by small and large group discussions. Nine meetings are planned between May 2018 and November 2019.

PRACTICE SITES

Two public health organizations were selected to serve as practice sites, chosen through an open call across Canada:

- **Interior Health** in British Columbia is implementing a health equity lens in opioid overdose reporting, monitoring and surveillance practices. The project will be guided by the *Equity-integrated population health status reporting: Action framework*.⁶
- **Ottawa Public Health** in Ontario will develop a client and community engagement framework and an engagement policy that incorporate a health equity and social determinants of health perspective for use across the organization.

Each practice site has a lead, a project team and a senior management champion. Each organization is supported by an NCCDH knowledge translation specialist. Representatives from the practice sites participate in learning circle meetings. These representatives have an opportunity to reflect on the relevance of the evidence to their own work and bring questions from their projects to the learning circle.

LITERATURE SCANS

Brief scans of the literature are conducted based on issues identified by the learning circle. These scans will focus on health equity capacity and organizational change broadly, as well as on the topical areas of the practice sites. A scan is undertaken prior to each circle meeting with the resulting evidence backgrounder presented to circle members.

ADVISORY GROUP

An advisory group provides overall guidance to the initiative. The advisory group is composed of public health and organizational development leaders and researchers.



SHARING WHAT WE LEARN

We will share what we learn throughout the course of the initiative in various formats. The evidence backgrounder and learning circle conversations will be synthesized and released in summary form, each focused on one evidence topic. A [webinar series](#) based on the learning circle discussions and practice site experiences will also be available. Each practice site will document learnings. In addition, the initiative process and findings will be presented at conferences.

For more information visit www.nccdh.ca.

Are you a public health practitioner interested in this topic? You can share ideas, experiences and resources on this topic through online discussions in Health Equity Clicks: Community, the NCCDH's online network. To sign up, visit www.nccdh.ca/community.

REFERENCES

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The National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH) is hosted by St. Francis Xavier University. We acknowledge that we are located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

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La version française est également disponible au www.ccnds.ca sous le titre *Capacité organisationnelle d'agir sur l'équité en santé : une description sommaire*.