

Better Connections for Better Health Care: A Feasibility Study for Establishing a Nova Scotia Academic Health Sciences Network

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Action Challenge:

This project examines the feasibility of creating an Academic Health Sciences Network (AHSN) across Nova Scotia, with the goal of enhancing collaboration between government, the health authorities, academic institutions and other key partners. By improving the connections between these stakeholders, a network would lead to research that is more relevant to Nova Scotia, enhanced education and improved clinical care.

Methods:

- For the purpose of this project, the aspects of feasibility studied included exploring definitions of AHSNs, identifying and interviewing key stakeholders and potential partners. A specific governance structure and costs for establishing an AHSN were not in the scope of this feasibility study.
- Reviewed related literature, including the 2010 White Paper from the National Task Force on the Future of Canada's Academic Health Sciences Centres.
- Interviewed key informants from established Canadian AHSNs to better understand the potential for an Atlantic AHSN to improve health care in Nova Scotia.
- Interviewed key provincial stakeholders from academia, health authorities, government, and the community (including physicians) to determine strengths and challenges with current relationships.
- Stakeholders were asked to identify potential opportunities and barriers to establishing an AHSN.

Findings:

1. There is a perceived lack of connectivity between stakeholders across Nova Scotia, which negatively impacts health outcomes.
2. Formal academic health networks integrating health education, research and clinical care have been shown to improve health outcomes.
3. Key stakeholders (health authorities, academic institutions, government and community partners) in Nova Scotia unanimously agree that a more integrated partnership is needed to optimize health care delivery moving forward.
4. An AHSN is a vehicle that will allow us to reach this goal.

Recommendations/Next Steps:

1. An opportunity exists to improve the health of all Nova Scotians by establishing an AHSN.
2. Key stakeholders are encouraged to come together to define shared vision and mission, and determine priority areas for project development.
3. Key stakeholders are advised to visit and learn from established Canadian AHSNs (such as British Columbia, Saskatchewan).
4. Provincial leadership in each of the areas of health research, education and clinical care, as well as representatives from government, industry and the community should unite to develop and implement an AHSN.

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