

Inspiring Healthy Futures “Network of Networks” Consultation Summary

In the winter of 2021, participants in the [Inspiring Healthy Futures](#) conversations identified **Mobilized communities around children, youth and families** as one of 5 Priorities for Systemic Change to Canada’s child and youth sector:

“With child, youth and family voices at the centre, create opportunities for everyone working in or concerned about the well-being of children, youth and families to connect, collaborate, build relationships, share resources and knowledge, and mobilize toward change.”

One possible approach is the creation of a national child, youth and family hub (“network of networks”), to connect a community of care spanning research, policy, systems, advocacy and services around children, youth and families.

Methodology

In July 2021, The Sandbox Project gathered feedback from the Canadian child and youth health and wellbeing sectors about the development of a national child, youth, and family hub or “network of networks” as a mechanism to connect the diverse communities of people who study, mobilize, advocate for and work with children, youth and families.

In collaboration with the Inspiring Healthy Futures [lead organizations](#), The Sandbox Project connected with stakeholders spanning families, youth, research, policy, systems, advocacy and services. Through discussion groups, one-on-one conversations, and surveys, we heard from 134 individuals and organizations. We identified key themes about the sector’s needs, as well as common features and characteristics that the sector would like to see in a potential hub.

Key Themes: Community and Shared Purpose

Overall, what we heard through this consultation aligns strongly with the initial concept put forward in the Inspiring Healthy Futures [Acceleration Agenda](#):

Building on existing platforms and networks, this initiative should enable people to locate others; find and create communities of practice; share knowledge, resources and ideas; support each other; collaborate on research and other initiatives; and share opportunities for youth involvement.

The two most prevalent themes from this work were participants’ need for **community** and for a **shared purpose** that mobilizes our networks.

Community

From the outset, Inspiring Healthy Futures outlined the importance of welcoming, inclusive spaces, or a *community of care*. Participants described not only “a sense of community,” i.e. a relationship-focused environment, but also the hub characteristics (non-hierarchical, user-driven) that enable these kinds of interactions. Though participants described a range of applications for a potential hub, these ideas were largely expressed as operating within such a community-powered structure.

Shared Purpose

Many participants felt strongly that a **shared purpose** is an essential ingredient in a successful hub. For a national hub to be effective, the sector would need to rally behind “common goals,” or “making an impact together.” Notably, many participants made clear that they would be unlikely to engage without *both* a sense of community and shared purpose in place.

What can this look like?

1. **Relationship building, including peer support:** Participants described the hub as a place they would go to connect over shared experiences, and to offer and receive navigation and emotional support. Youth expressed a desire for mentorship and connection with professionals in various child and youth fields.
2. **Non-hierarchical:** There was broad agreement that a flat, non-hierarchical structure would be essential in an inclusive and engaging hub, especially as many families and youth find healthcare and research to be intimidating.
3. **One-stop-shop:** A successful hub would be multifaceted and multipurpose, a mixture of community/relationship-building and practical/outcome-oriented elements from the outset.
4. **Community-driven leadership:** A flexible hub that offers a range of “dedicated spaces” would enable and empower existing leadership to tailor their engagement and better mobilize their own networks.

Other important themes that participants highlighted:

- Stakeholders in the child and youth sector are experiencing a lack of connectedness within the sector; current networks are fragmented and working in silos.
- Stakeholders want a platform for resource and knowledge sharing.
- Equity and inclusivity must be at the core of any potential hub’s activities and outreach. The hub can only be effective if it welcomes all voices to the table and serves the diversity of children, youth and families in Canada, including but not limited to, BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+ communities, newcomers and immigrants, individuals with disabilities and complex needs, and individuals in remote and rural communities.
- Accessibility is a significant factor in whether a potential child, youth, and family hub will be successful. Examples of accessibility features that can be implemented include captioning, multi-lingual content and interpretation including American Sign Language, and voice-to-text capabilities.
- Meaningful youth and user engagement will be necessary for adapting, creating, implementing and evaluating any hub.

Characteristics and Features of a Potential Hub

In terms of structure, the most popular hub features were: a member directory, discussion forum, bulletin board, direct messaging, virtual discussions, and having a place to sign up for learning or knowledge exchange opportunities. Youth highlighted the importance of visuals (e.g. photos, graphics) and bright colours. There was also significant agreement in support of mobile functionality, reaction buttons and “dedicated spaces” - the ability for users to create subgroups or rooms. Many accessibility features were also recommended.

Looking Ahead

The Inspiring Healthy Futures team will use the insights from this consultation to determine the feasibility of a national hub, to identify areas of capacity for co-creation within Canada’s child and youth sectors, and to collaborate with existing hubs to help increase the impacts of existing resources.

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