Yukon Primary Health Care Transition Fund Initiative

Provincial–Territorial Envelope

Lead and Partner Organization(s)


Background and Goals

The Yukon government faces many challenges in delivering health services from a structural, functional and technological perspective. For example, one-third of its people live in small population pockets of a few hundred people, while two-thirds live in the urban capital of Whitehorse. Despite the territory’s small population, its health care system is quite complex, with services delivered or funded by three levels of government (federal, territorial and First Nation). Life expectancies of Yukoners are about 10 per cent lower than the Canadian average, and the territory posts the highest death rates in Canada due to accidents and injuries. The Yukon government recognized that improvements to both the coordination and efficiency of its health care system were needed, new linkages among providers were required, and the roles and responsibilities of the individual, family and community needed to be examined. To achieve this, Yukon’s initiatives centred on two objectives: to increase the emphasis on health promotion, disease and injury prevention and management of chronic diseases; and to facilitate coordination and integration with other health services.

Activities

This initiative, which ran from January 2003 to September 2006, undertook the following activities, which can be grouped into two categories of priorities that further classified Yukon objectives: refocus organizational structures and processes; and implement improved technology to support structures and processes.

- Refocus organizational structures and processes. Smaller action areas were identified, and activities occurred under each. Under the area of healthy living, activities included: a public campaign strategy providing parenting information; a walking program to promote active living; and a literature review on healthy eating. For providing health information, activities encompassed: producing a Yukon Health Guide; enabling web access and creating a nurse information line; developing a program information and disability handbook; and conducting a study on access to professional health literature. To address key health issues, activities included: funding a child development centre to train providers in early diagnosis and intervention of fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS); giving funds to the FAS Society of Yukon for prevention and support; funding addictions research; providing diabetes collaborative learning sessions; securing electronic access to a toolkit for chronic disease management (CDM); and implementing a national ambulatory care reporting system.

- Implement improved technology to support structures and processes. Pre-established information technology (IT) priorities guided a separate IT steering committee. IT activities included developing a mental health synapse and a community nursing integrated public health information system (iPHIS).

An evaluation plan provided an evaluation framework and an assessment of process, outputs and outcomes. Data are still forthcoming; it is hoped that knowledge gained will be used in future policy, planning and practice.

Resources

- Report on the primary health care planning forum
- Public campaign strategy to provide parenting information
- Literature review on options and support for promoting healthy eating
• Yukon Health Guide and web-accessed information (based on British Columbia’s model)
• Program information and disability handbook
• Training program for providers on early diagnosis and intervention of FAS (10 workers trained)
• Alcohol and drug research and survey
• Diabetes collaborative learning sessions and a CDM toolkit
• Ambulatory care reporting system in Whitehorse General Hospital
• Two feasibility studies on continuing care multi-level care facilities
• Literature review and consultation on palliative care in Yukon
• IT synapse application for mental health clinicians and iPHIS application immunization module for community nurses

Key Learnings

Generally, Yukon has shifted the way it thinks about providing primary care services. The benefits of working together more effectively have been seen, resulting in a different thinking of how Yukon might organize itself at all levels of the health system, from government and non-governmental organizations to practice settings. Evaluation is ongoing for this initiative; however, learnings to date have been grouped according to four action areas: healthy living, health information, key health issues and technology.

1) Healthy Living: Promoting physical activity through a walking program had very mixed results. Workplace participation increased, but individual and rural community involvement decreased. Providing more parent information led to increased collaboration among stakeholders who deliver parenting programs.

2) Health Information: The Diabetes Collaborative, considered to be Yukon’s success story, improved coordination and collaboration among health providers. Success was achieved through the use of learning sessions for providers and obtaining access to British Columbia’s CDM toolkit. This collaborative provided the opportunity for health professionals to work together to undertake activities such as group patient visits for diabetes care. The Yukon Health Guide was distributed to 13,500 households, and survey results indicate that 65 per cent of Yukoners recall receiving the guide; and, of that number, 82 per cent have used it.

3) Key Health Issues: The Yukon Alcohol and Drug Survey identified what could be done differently and by whom in order to respond appropriately to individuals who need these services. The Palliative Care Development Project increased coordination among care providers and identified key areas for future programming, including access, coordination, support and education, with specific recommendations for each. Ambulatory care reporting data on mental health/addictions and injury information are now used in the Whitehorse General Hospital, but the same system could not be implemented in Yukon communities.

4) Technology: The IT initiatives laid the groundwork for implementation of an electronic health record and other IT developments. Infoway is now providing support separately from the PHCTF in preparing a broad information management plan for Yukon.

Sustainability has been a challenge to the Yukon initiative from the beginning. The intent was for all projects within the initiative to be self-sustaining; however, this could not always be achieved. That said, new funding has been provided through the Territorial Health Access Fund (THAF) for some of the activities, including healthy living initiatives, palliative care programming, implementation of a nurse information line, and development of a health human resources strategy.

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