

Through the month of June, clinical experts and health system leaders involved in the development of Manitoba's first Provincial Clinical and Preventive Services Plan participated in seven district meetings held by the Association of Manitoba Municipalities.

Meetings included participation of an estimated 500 municipal elected representatives from 114 communities across the province. Provincial Clinical Team members shared information on the progress on the clinical plan and responded to the questions of municipal leaders. Municipal officials raised challenges specific to the delivery of care in their communities and offered local perspective and feedback to inform the overall plan.

The sessions began with an overview of the [planning](#) process, which includes nearly 300 [clinical leaders](#) from a variety of professional backgrounds and experience whose expertise has informed the analysis of data, service delivery and models of care. Providers have been working to identify initiatives that will allow Manitoba to support the increasing demands of patients within a sustainable system that is equipped to deliver high quality, appropriate care as close to home as possible.

Discussion focused on the importance of building capacity closer to home, ensuring that health resources in every community across the province are working together within a well-coordinated system to support the delivery of consistent care to Manitoba patients.



Small group discussion followed, with participants invited to provide feedback to clinical leaders on five strategic shifts which have been identified through clinical planning as being necessary to improved access, consistency and quality of care for patients. These priority shifts ([Enhance Local Capacity](#); [Increase Access to Specialized Care](#); [Build Care Closer to Home](#); [Provincial Practice Improvements](#); [Effective Chronic Condition Management](#)) will better coordinate how and where care is delivered, ensuring that facilities and health services across Manitoba offer care that is both appropriate to the population they serve and is able to be consistently supported by the human resources available locally.

Each meeting concluded with a question and answer period, during which community leaders raised local issues and received further information on aspects of the provincial plan from clinical leaders with expertise in: emergency medicine, primary care, women's health, diagnostics, emergency response, mental health and addictions, surgery and other specialty areas of practice.



Here is what we heard:

Change is necessary but caution is urged

At each session, municipal representatives acknowledged the long-standing challenges and barriers to consistent access and quality of health services in communities throughout the province. While the need for improvement was not questioned, participants did urge caution around the speed of change and asked for consideration of the impact health system changes may have on the broader economies of communities and regions.

Participants discussed the financial imperative of a more sustainable health system and acknowledged the challenge of a limited population base continuing to support vital investments in education, infrastructure and other priority areas without addressing the rate of growth in health spending. Municipal leaders were clear however, that improved patient safety, access and quality of care must remain the central motivation and primary focus of any changes.

Municipalities want to be involved in efforts to improve care for their residents

The strategic shifts in care identified through clinical planning - care closer to home, enhanced local capacity and increased access to specialized care – all resonated as priorities for municipal leaders.

Participants in the June District meetings expressed their interest in supporting the ongoing availability of health services in their communities and asked to be actively involved in ongoing planning discussions. Leaders highlighted the human and financial costs associated with members of their communities having to travel long distances to access health services.

Leaders emphasized the need for physicians and other providers to be supportive and willing to use new technology and to incorporate modernized practices into their work. Several spoke of their involvement and success in efforts related to local recruitment and retention.

Increased availability and use of technology will benefit rural patients

The burden of traveling long distances to access care was raised at each session. Sessions included reference to the often long commutes to Winnipeg for specialist appointments which prompted discussion around opportunities to provide care closer to home, leveraging digital health technology.

Sessions included details on how care in a provincial network may be provided by a combination of local access in-person to a health care provider and virtual consultation(s) with specialists or a referral or transfer to a specialized centre for more complex care. Leaders expressed support for the use of technology to bring care closer to home but raised concerns about the challenges posed by unreliable connectivity throughout some parts of the province.

While there was great interest in the opportunities presented by expanded MBTelehealth, including the increased support the service offers to local physicians by connecting them with specialists, municipal leaders asked for assurances that the use of technology will reduce the need for patients to travel in order to access health services.

Investments in technology were also supported, including numerous references to the need for a provincial electronic medical record system to enable providers to access and share patient information, thereby reducing the need for patients to repeat their story with each referral.

Enhance efforts to recruit, retain and train health care providers

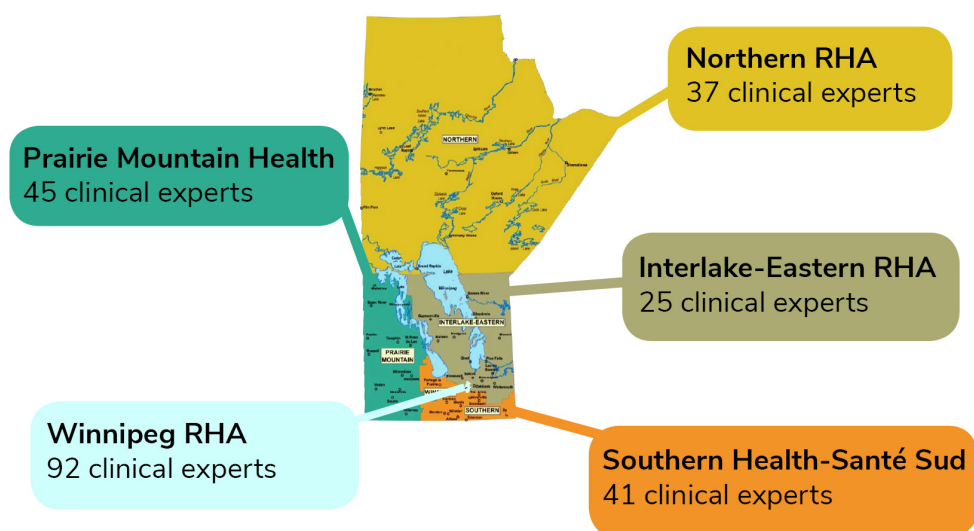
Common to all seven meetings was a focus on the need to train, recruit and retain the appropriate health care professionals needed to deliver care to each region's specific population. The importance of primary care and community services being accessible closer to home was supported as a central focus of the clinical plan however leaders expressed concern about the ability of rural and remote communities to attract, retain and provide ongoing training for providers. Municipal leaders also provided input and detailed their experience in local efforts to recruit to their communities and expressed some concern about the potential effect that changes to the level of care available locally may have on future recruitment and retention.

Breakdown silos and increase standardization of care across Regional Health Authorities

A common issue raised by participants was the variation in services that are available across Manitoba's regional health authorities. Officials called for increased consistency, citing the need for certainty, particularly for those residents who live close to regional boundaries and who may seek service in one or more regions

Physicians and clinical providers are opinion leaders in their communities; their support for the plan is important

Ensuring that local physicians and clinical staff are involved with the development – and supportive of the overall direction – of the clinical plan is important to municipal leaders. Each session included the questions, “Who from our area is involved in the plan's development” and “What do our local health care providers think about the plan?”



Ensuring communities are supported by the appropriate type and number of health care providers was also raised at each session. Participants raised concerns about staff turnover and burnout as well as the ability of physicians to maintain their skills.

Ensuring providers are able to work to their full scope of practice, are equipped with the skill set to support the needs of the local population and are provided opportunities to maintain or upgrade their skills, were all raised by municipal leaders being critical to the success of the overall plan. Participants were informed that a provincial health human resources plan is being developed to accompany the clinical plan, ensuring the “right” providers are available in communities across the province.

Need for increased access to mental health and addictions services

The increasing need for mental health and addictions services was reported as being evident in communities across the province. Participants at times referenced their own personal stories of the challenges faced by providers and community members in accessing services for patients and loved ones. Leaders referenced confusing patient pathways, a lack of resources locally and challenges that the lack of available local services create for law enforcement and social services.

Access to home care, assisted living, personal care homes

With many municipalities reporting an aging population many leaders cited increased access to home care, assisted living and personal care homes as urgent priorities that would enable community members to remain close to home throughout their lifetime. Municipalities expressed concern with the limited level of care and inconsistent access to home care. They also highlighted the challenge of continuing to care for patients in hospital who would be more appropriately housed in the community either with assistance at home or in a personal care home. Leaders highlighted the need to both enhance these services and to ensure they are appropriately integrated with other parts of the health system to ensure appropriate access to more specialized care when needed.

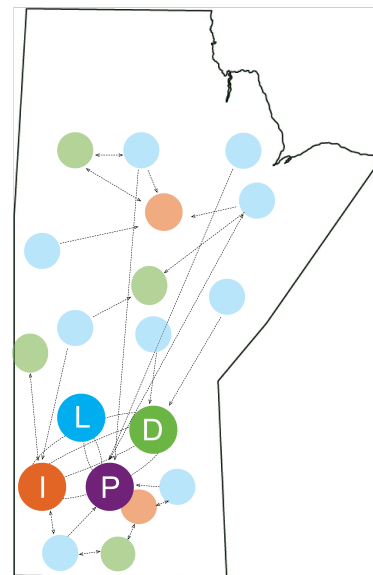
Understand the needs and addressing the challenges of EMS and Patient Transport services

Timely access to EMS and patient transport services was raised as a priority issue at each session. Participants expressed their desire for updated information and transparent planning of service changes that might impact their communities or neighbouring areas. They urged clinical leaders to acknowledge and champion the importance of skilled and timely emergency response for all communities.

Use of ground transportation via ambulance as well as access to aviation services for emergency response or patient transport were also raised as priorities and municipal leaders asked to be kept informed of planning efforts to ensure efficient use of these resources.

The Network Model and the need for public education

Many questions were asked about the network model and what it means for specific communities across the province. Municipal leaders spoke passionately about their local hospital or health centre. Others referenced the impact of long-term or intermittent suspensions on their ability to access consistent care, as well as the need for community engagement and public information about where to go for care once decisions are made about where hubs will be located, what services they will offer and how patients will be assured access to more specialized care when it is needed.



Participants highlighted the reality of many communities where emergency departments are the destination of choice for many residents seeking primary care. As changes are made to how and where services are offered, municipal leaders emphasized the need for a strong public education focus to ensure clarity for members of the public.

A focus on prevention

A recurring theme across the district sessions was the need for an increased focus on prevention and screening to ensure ongoing management and improvement of the general health of the population. Leaders felt strongly that a prevention-focused plan will help reduce Manitoba's dependence on health services over the long term. Clinical leads echoed this as a priority and assured leaders that prevention and public health have been informing the development of the plan.

Social determinants of health; organizations working together

Throughout the meetings, participants often remarked on the expectations placed on the health system to resolve or address issues (i.e. housing, education, employment, transportation, etc.) that cross many jurisdictional boundaries – across organizations, government departments and communities. Municipal leaders sought confirmation of engagement happening with non-health system entities throughout the development of the provincial plan and expressed the importance of all levels of government as well as community and non-government service providers and organizations being closely integrated to provide appropriate, whole of society support and services to community members.

ENGAGING OUR PARTNERS



More than **500** community leaders across **7** provincial districts have been engaged in planning.

As well as more than **158** Boards of Directors and other advisory groups, including representatives from Francophone Affairs Secretariat, Santé en Français and the Indigenous Advisory Council.

*as of June 30, 2019

Next Steps

Work is now underway to incorporate feedback and to finalize models of care that will meet the needs of the population while ensuring sustainability and consistency into the future in areas like human resources and digital health.

We thank all municipal leaders who attended sessions and actively participated in discussions. As we begin to add more details to our plans, we look forward to future engagement sessions.

Click [here](#) to view the full Better Care Closer to Home presentation.