

Topic Overview

Addressing Health-System Sustainability in Ontario

Citizen panel
12 November 2016

The McMaster Health Forum convened a citizen panel on the subject of addressing health-system sustainability in Ontario. The panel was organized with the support of the Ontario Medical Association. The panel brought together 12 citizens from urban, sub-urban, and rural regions of Ontario to examine the problem, elements of a potentially comprehensive approach for addressing it and key implementation considerations. The purpose of the panel was to inform the efforts of the Ontario Medical Association in launching a discussion on the pressing challenges and future changes needed to guide Ontario's health system towards sustainability.

Discussing the problem

Participants identified five challenges related to addressing health-system sustainability in Ontario: 1) inconsistent access to health services; 2) lack of accountability for providing high-quality care; 3) insufficient attention paid to what helps keep people healthy; 4) limited access to reliable and easily understandable information on health and the health system; and 5) misalignment of the political system to support and achieve long-term change.



The views expressed in the panel summary are the views of panel participants and should not be taken to represent the views of the Ontario Medical Association, or the authors of the panel summary.





Twelve citizens from urban, sub-urban, and rural regions of Ontario gather during a McMaster Health Forum event on 12 November 2016.

Discussing the options

To help curb demand-side challenges to sustainability (element 1), participants emphasized the need for citizens to improve their levels of health literacy and to begin making healthier choices. Participants stressed that efforts to improve health literacy should focus on empowering individuals with demographic-specific education to support healthy decisions and to navigate the health system. Participants also expressed the need for increased use of technology and changes to their community environments to encourage healthy lifestyle behaviours. In discussing element 2 (ensure value for money by addressing challenges related to the supply of healthcare), participants identified three criteria that they thought should be met when making health-system decisions: 1) use a transparent process for decision-making and publicly communicate the steps taken to arrive at policy decisions; 2) use the best available evidence when making decisions about the health system and the programs, services or drugs provided within it; and 3) monitor and evaluate decisions to document whether the decision achieved the desired outcome. Finally, for enhancing approaches to leadership that support innovation and sustainability (element 3), participants supported the development of a non-partisan council made up of representatives from across the health system, including citizens, who would be tasked with ongoing monitoring and reporting on long-term health-system reforms.

Discussing the implementation considerations

When turning to potential barriers and facilitators to addressing health-system sustainability, participants identified two barriers: 1) lack of political will and current partisan approaches to politics limiting the likelihood for long-term policy reforms, which would require agreement and implementation across successive governments to take shape; and 2) current budgetary constraints at the provincial level and the lack of public support for increasing the tax base could limit the implementation of whole-system change. Participants however, identified increased debate and discussion about the health system as a potential window of opportunity for health-system sustainability to be made a priority in the next provincial election.

Panel deliverables

To learn more about this topic, consult the [citizen brief](#) that was presented to participants before the panel and the [summary of the panel](#). For an electronic copy of the citizen brief or panel summary, visit our website www.mcmasterhealthforum.com and click on 'Products' along the sidebar.