

# Improving Systems Together: The Service Collaborative Approach

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The **Provincial System Support Program (PSSP)** at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Ontario, Canada moves evidence to action to transform the province's mental health and addictions system. **Service Collaboratives** are a key approach to achieve this goal.

## What is a Service Collaborative?

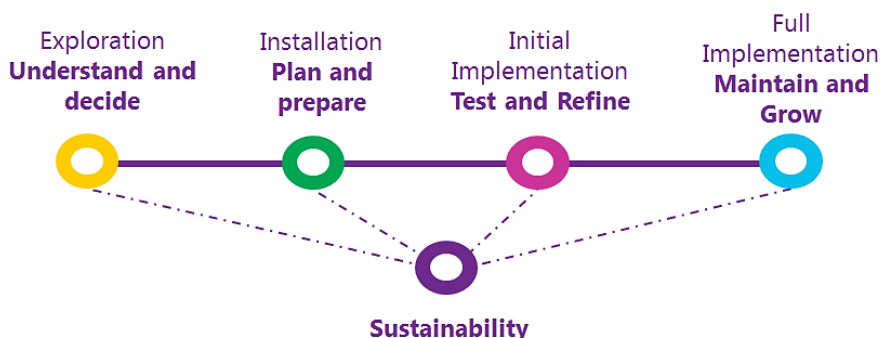
The diverse sectors that support individuals with mental health and addiction challenges often operate in silos, leaving clients and families to navigate a complex and fragmented system. Service Collaboratives break down silos by bringing together diverse partners to **close system gaps** and **implement meaningful interventions** in local communities. Membership includes a wide range of sectors such as:

- hospital and community mental health and addictions;
- education;
- justice;
- child welfare;
- housing; and
- settlement, among others.

In addition, Service Collaboratives meaningfully engage individuals with lived experience and family members and help connect service providers and policymakers.

## Implementing System Change

PSSP's Implementation Teams use an **Implementation Science** framework combined with tools and facilitation approaches from **quality improvement** and **system design** to support Service Collaboratives in making system change. Implementation Science aims to understand the behaviour of healthcare stakeholders and to identify and address the barriers to effective and sustainable adoption of evidence-based interventions.<sup>1</sup> Service Collaboratives **tackle complex system challenges** that cannot easily be addressed without partnerships and well-coordinated action. PSSP implementation teams help coordinate the overall change process and guide Service Collaboratives through four implementation stages.



1. National Institutes of Health, Fogarty International Center. (2013). *Frequently asked questions about implementation*. Retrieved from: <https://www.fic.nih.gov/researchtopics/pages/implementation-science.aspx>

## Team-based Implementation Support

Implementing new practices and programs in a complex environment requires a systematic and deliberate approach. In addition to expertise in implementation, PSSP Implementation Teams help Service Collaboratives accomplish their system improvement goals by applying knowledge and skills in:

- **Knowledge Exchange:** Connecting Service Collaborative members with relevant, actionable evidence to inform decision-making, and sharing lessons learned through effective communication;
- **Evaluation:** Supporting measurement of Service Collaborative activities and interventions;
- **Equity and Engagement:** Engaging diverse partners and ensuring that the voices, priorities and perspectives of minority, marginalized and vulnerable populations are heard (for example, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and Francophones); and
- **Coaching:** Providing on-the-ground support to stakeholders implementing new practices, including guidance through rapid improvement cycles and establishing processes and strategies to ensure that interventions are implemented as intended.

Implementation teams are located in nine regional offices across Ontario, with coordination and resources from PSSP's provincial office in Toronto.



## What have Service Collaboratives accomplished?

Since 2012, stakeholders in Ontario have established **21 Service Collaboratives** with the support of PSSP. Service Collaboratives in Ontario have involved over **700 agencies** and touched **15,000** clients. They have enhanced local systems by:

- ✓ Providing a space for meaningful cross-sector collaboration between diverse stakeholders that may not have traditionally worked together, including clients and families, direct service providers, and system and agency leaders;
- ✓ Applying a health equity lens throughout all implementation stages;
- ✓ Using the best available evidence, including research, professional expertise, lived experience, and traditional knowledge;
- ✓ Co-developing interventions and implementing evidence-informed practices to address the needs of local communities;
- ✓ Developing shared processes and tools for cross-sector service delivery (e.g., program guidelines and best practices);
- ✓ Enhancing existing community capacities; and
- ✓ Contributing to meaningful system improvement for clients and families.