



# Ontario's Patient Engagement Framework

Creating a strong culture of patient engagement to support high quality health care

**Health Quality  
Ontario**

*Let's make our health system healthier*



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# Engaging for Quality – A Call to Action

Across Ontario, health care professionals, policy-makers, and organizations are actively engaging with patients, their families, other informal caregivers, and members of the public to understand their needs, experiences and preferences to improve health care quality.

**Patient Engagement** means patients, family members and other informal caregivers, and health care professionals actively collaborating to improve health care quality in Ontario. It includes individual health care professionals, health care organizations and the province partnering with patients and their loved ones in different ways to understand their experiences, preferences and needs, and respond to them.

When we say “patient”, we are referring to patients cared for in hospitals, people being cared for in their homes or through community programs, and residents living in long-term care homes.

Engaging with patients and their caregivers transforms care. From reducing Emergency Department readmissions<sup>i</sup> to increasing patient safety and satisfaction<sup>ii</sup>, involving patients and their loved ones in the conversation about how to improve health care quality generates important results for people receiving care, for health care professionals, and for the health system at-large.

And the momentum for engagement is only growing.

To promote and support the drive for active patient engagement, Health Quality Ontario released the province’s first **Patient Engagement Framework** in the fall of 2016, to define a common approach for engagement across the province. Its purpose is to guide people in planning for, implementing and evaluating patient engagement activities across each of the health system’s domains: in personal care and health decisions, in organizational program or service design, and in health care policy, strategy and governance.

Designed to ensure that patients and members of the public are able to make and influence decisions that affect their lives, the framework is based on active consultation with more than 1,000 patients, caregivers and health care professionals from different regions, sectors and levels of the health system. The framework also recognizes the unique engagement needs and preferences of each of these groups and is based on leading research on patient engagement both within Canada and abroad.

This guide provides a short introduction to each part of the framework, to support patients, caregivers and health professionals to engage effectively with each other.

Working together, there is no limit to the quality of care that Ontario can achieve.

# Ontario's Patient Engagement Framework

## THE STRATEGIC GOAL

A strong culture of patient, caregiver and public engagement to support high quality health care

## THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Partnership

Learning

Empowerment

Transparency

Responsiveness

Respect

## ACROSS THESE DOMAINS

Personal care and health decisions

Program and service design

Policy, strategy and governance

## ACROSS A SPECTRUM OF ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES

Share



Provide easy-to-understand health information

Consult



Get feedback on a health issue (e.g., policy or decision)

Deliberate



Discuss an issue and explore solutions

Collaborate



Partner to address an issue and apply solutions

## ENABLED BY:

A culture of continuous quality improvement

Access to easy-to-understand health information

Commitment to health equity and cultural competence

Rigorous research and evaluation



# About the Patient Engagement Framework

Above is a snapshot of what the framework entails, with explanations of each of its four sections to follow.

To begin, the framework starts with its purpose, or strategic goal: **To create a strong culture for patient, caregiver and public engagement in Ontario to support health care quality.**

It then highlights the core principles for success – partnership, transparency, learning, responsiveness, empowerment and respect.

From there, it goes on to clearly state that engagement should **occur across each domain of the health system** – when patients are making personal health care decisions with their health care professionals; when organizations are designing new programs and making improvements to existing services; and when it comes to policy, strategy and governance to ensure a balanced patient engagement process within each domain.

The framework also highlights the **spectrum of engagement approaches** – from sharing, to consulting, to deliberating, to collaborating – and recognizes that these approaches should be customized depending on the engagement goals and setting, and that they often happen simultaneously.



And lastly, the Framework highlights the **enablers** that make high quality engagement possible – a dedication to continuous quality improvement; the provision of easy-to-understand information; a commitment to engaging all, including those from under-served populations; and rigorous research and evaluation to constantly learn from our efforts.

Ontario's Patient Engagement Framework is designed to inspire action towards the ultimate goal – a strong culture of engagement that drives continuously towards better care and better health for Ontarians. With patients and caregivers as partners, there is no limit to the quality of care that Ontario can achieve.





# Learn About the Guiding Principles for Engagement

Health Quality Ontario believes that six principles define a strong culture of engagement between patients, their caregivers and health professionals. Each principle and the statement accompanying it are not meant to be comprehensive, but are meant to spark discussion on the com-

mitments necessary to bring about effective engagement. Consider what each of these principles means and how you may be able to bring them to life in your patient engagement work. They will help to ensure engagement activities are meaningful to everyone involved.

## These six principles are:

**Partnership** – Meaningful patient engagement requires authentic, timely and mutually beneficial relationships forged between patients, their family members, other informal caregivers, health professionals and the organizations they work with.

**Learning** – All participants in patient engagement should expect to learn – about each other’s perspectives and experiences, about facts about the issue at hand, and about how things may improve and be better.

**Empowerment** – Patients and their caregivers need to feel empowered to openly express their needs, perspectives and concerns without fear of reprisal, and to make informed decisions with confidence.

**Transparency** – Transparency means that health care professionals and organizations are honest about their apprehensions, resource limitations, and knowledge gaps when it comes to engaging with patients and caregivers.

**Responsiveness** - Being responsive means that health care professionals and organizations act upon the voices of patients, their caregivers and the general public in ways that demonstrate the positive impact of this input.

**Respect:** Health care professionals and organizations demonstrate respect for their patient and caregiver partners by actively showing signs of appreciation for their time, ideas, lived experiences, various worldviews and cultural locations.





# Identify the Different Domains for Patient Engagement

Patients and caregivers should be meaningfully engaged to improve health care quality in different domains of care – in personal care relationships between patients and their health care professionals, in organizational program and service design, and in policy, strategy and governance decisions.

Differentiating between these domains will help to pinpoint priorities for engagement. It is also helpful to consider all of the domains together to develop a comprehensive approach to an organization’s engagement activities, or the health system at large.

## **Domain A: Personal Care and Health Decisions**

Engaging in the domain of *personal care and health decisions* means health care professionals partner with patients and their caregivers in processes of shared decision-making and care.

For example, effective engagement in this domain includes the ways patients, their caregivers, physicians, nurses and allied health professionals partner to ensure care plans best reflect a patient’s needs, wants, and circumstances. It also includes providing support for patients and caregivers to be effective members of a care team, by giving them education and supportive resources.

### **Personal Care and Health Decisions: Using “Teach Back” to Support Patient Care and Health Decision-Making**

Through ongoing health care staff training, Grey Bruce Health Services in Owen Sound empowers clinical staff to use “teach back” as a way of supporting patient. Teach back is a communication method whereby health care staff share health information and medical instructions with their patients, who then repeat it back in their own words.

The hospital is using teach back to support discharge planning, medication reconciliation, and for self-management education. Teach back is helping patients and their caregivers to take on more active roles in understanding and making health decisions based on the information they are given. Teach back increases patient retention of health information and empowers patients to be partners in their own care.

Health care professionals effectively engaging patients in their personal care and health decisions can lead to better and more trusting relationships<sup>iii</sup>, increased patient activation and capacity to manage health conditions<sup>iv</sup>, adherence to a care plan, and ultimately better health outcomes<sup>vi vii</sup>.







### **Program and Service Design: Engaging a Community to Improve Palliative Care**

At Rouge Valley Health System, a community advisory group is involved in discussions at the organizational level to improve the quality of end-of-life care. Group members have played an active role in quality improvement, facilitating nine focus groups with community members, staff, physicians and board members to understand how stakeholders currently experience end-of-life care. The findings are helping the organization place a special focus on palliative care services and to maximize the proportion of palliative care patients discharged from hospital with home support.

### **Domain B: Program and Service Design**

Engaging patients in the domain of organizational *program and service design* means health organizations initiate engagement activities that invite patient and caregiver input for the purpose of improving specific health programs, services, or other organization-wide projects such as quality and safety improvement initiatives.

It's often a specific health care unit, program, project team or working group within the organization that undertakes patient engagement in this domain. For example, a fracture clinic within a community hospital may wish to partner with patients and their caregivers to choose a new layout and seats for their waiting room. Or, staff at a long-term care

home may wish to engage with their residents' council to redesign their home's menu and laundry service.

Engaging patients is an important way for organizations to develop new programs and services, and to determine whether existing programs or services are meeting the needs of the patient and caregiver populations they serve. Engaging patients can also generate ideas that harness patient experiences, concerns and dissatisfaction, and identify possible improvements.



## **Domain C: Policy, Strategy and Governance**

Engaging patients in the domain of *policy, strategy and governance* means health organizations and government partnering with patients and caregivers to identify, and help bring into creation, more accountable health priorities, policies and governance models.

### **Policy, Strategy and Governance: Engaging Family Members in the Hiring Process**

Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital in Toronto engages the parents and family members of clients on hiring committees. The hospital's senior leadership, front-line staff, and family advisors partner to screen applicants for various positions, conduct interviews, and select successful candidates. Family advisors are supported with ongoing orientation and resources to enable their full participation in this process.

By sharing power and decision-making over the hiring process, the hospital encourages clients and their families to have a sense.

Engagement in this domain ensures that policy priorities and resource allocation reflect the values and priorities of past, current, and future patients. In this domain, patient engagement is a key way that health organizations, health associations, provincial government agencies and policy-makers can demonstrate accountability, promote transparency, and respond to patient needs.

For health care organizations, examples of engagement in this domain include appointing patient representatives to a board or to the hiring committee for the CEO; hosting a public meeting to engage patients in the development of a new strategic plan; or striking a patients' panel to provide advice on an important strategic decision.

Engagement in this domain also includes efforts to engage patients in the development of system-level policy by organizations such as the Local Health Integration Networks, government agencies, or the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. This can take the form of individual advisors embedded in policy development teams, patient councils that help to define and offer advice on how to address particular policy challenges, or online surveys requesting feedback about a policy proposal.

# Learn About the Varying Approaches to Patient Engagement

Health Quality Ontario believes patient engagement can be meaningful across a spectrum of engagement activities – and that the most appropriate approach to engagement depends on the issue and the goals for engagement. From sharing great plain language information or resources, to consulting patients staying in hospital on family visitation policy, to co-designing a program – all approaches are beneficial as long as they are done purposefully and in line with best practices.

For these reasons, and consistent with other engagement frameworks<sup>viii ix x xi</sup>, Health Quality Ontario’s Patient Engagement Framework outlines different approaches to engagement along a spectrum. These are:



**Share** – This includes the ways health organizations provide information that is easy for patients and their caregivers to get, understand and act upon, to support personal care decisions, as well to support engagement about a program, service, policy or decision.

**Consult** – This includes the ways health professionals, organizations and system planners get feedback from patients and their caregivers on a health issue, policy, or decision that needs to be made.



**Deliberate** – This includes the ways patients and their caregivers are engaged to discuss a health issue, policy, or decision, and begin to explore solutions with health care professionals.

**Collaborate** – This includes patients and their caregivers, health professionals, planners, and organizations finding and applying solutions together to a health issue, policy, or decision.



There is no “one size fits all” approach to ensure patient engagement is done in meaningful and integrated ways. The same approach may look and feel different depending on the health sector, setting, and region, and may produce varying results. The key to integrated and successful patient engagement is matching the right approach, to the right situation, at the right time – and often using more than one approach to achieve the intended goal.





# Find Out About the Enablers of Patient Engagement

Meaningful engagement depends on having certain enablers in place. Recent research has highlighted that “engagement-capable environments”<sup>xiii</sup> require foundational ethics and values, knowledge and understanding, infrastructure and resource support to develop successful and integrated patient engagement activities.

Health Quality Ontario’s Patient Engagement Framework builds on this research and lists four enablers that specifically support patient engagement to improve health care quality:

## **A culture of continuous quality improvement** –

Meaningful patient engagement requires an ongoing commitment from health organizations, and the staff who lead them, to continuously improve – and to use the experiences, perspectives and needs of patients and their caregivers to inform what needs improving.

## **Access to easy-to-understand health information** –

Patient engagement requires health professionals, organizations, and the whole health system to offer patients meaningful opportunities to learn about their health care, and broader health policy and strategy, through access to patient-friendly health information.

## **Commitment to health equity and cultural**

**competence** – Engaging patients and caregivers for



health equity means health care professionals, planners, and organizations have a responsibility to engage with – and respond to – the unique needs of all patients, including those from social groups that have long been disadvantaged by the health system.

**Rigorous research and evaluation** – Evaluating the process and outputs of patient engagement activities helps to demonstrate its value, and build a case for engaging patients and caregivers in new ways.

All of these enablers support meaningful patient engagement and health system change by integrating patient perspectives into quality improvement efforts.







# Put it all Together – Engage Strategically for Better Quality Care

This framework is designed to support your efforts to engage with patients and caregivers, and to develop your own patient engagement strategy. A comprehensive patient engagement strategy should aim to:

- Achieve a **strategic goal** – a strong culture of patient, caregiver and public engagement to support high quality health care;
- Embed the **six guiding principles** for meaningful engagement in all activities;
- Build and connect engagement activities within, and across, the three **domains**;
- Employ a range of engagement **approaches** from one end of the spectrum, to the other; and
- Actively build on and feed back into the four **enablers** of engagement.

Building a comprehensive patient engagement strategy requires a commitment to ongoing education and learning among health care staff, and the patients and caregivers they partner with. We encourage you to use the Patient Engagement Framework to identify priorities for engagement and ways to build a culture of engagement amongst patients, their caregivers and health professionals.

In strategic discussions it is helpful too, to talk about the common challenges and barriers to engagement that your staff and patient and caregiver partners experience, and lead a discussion on creative supports and solutions.

To help you thoughtfully engage patients and caregivers for better quality care, visit Health Quality Ontario's **Patient Engagement Hub** to get supportive tools and resources to guide your engagement activities.

Patient engagement is an important part of a high-functioning, high-quality health system. We hope you will use the framework to better understand patient engagement and the practices you can use to do it.

For more information contact [engagement@hqontario.ca](mailto:engagement@hqontario.ca)



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<sup>i</sup> In 2016/2016, Mississauga Halton Community Care Access Centre and Trillium Health Partners collaborated through the *Seamless Transitions* initiative to engage patients and their caregivers transitioning from hospital to homecare. As reported in the Mississauga Halton Community Care Access Centre's *2015/2016 Quality Improvement Plan*, patients and caregivers who took part in the initiative were 52% less likely to experience Emergency Department readmissions.

<sup>ii</sup> In 2016/2017, St. Joseph's Health Care London engaged patients and their caregivers as part of a hand hygiene campaign to improve patient safety and satisfaction. As part of the campaign, and to make sure patients and their caregivers are partners in care, they are encouraged to share anonymous feedback on how well health care staff are following hand hygiene practices.

<sup>iii</sup> Dang, B.N., Westbrook, R.A., Njue, S.M., and Giordano, T.P. (2017). Building Trust and Rapport Early in the New Doctor-Patient Relationship: A longitudinal qualitative study. *BMC Medical Education*, 17(1).

<sup>iv</sup> Greene, J., Hibbard, J.H., Sacks, R., Overton, V., and Parrotta, C.D. (2015). When Patient Activation Levels Change, Health Outcomes and Costs Change, Too. *Health Affairs*, 34(3).

<sup>v</sup> Doyle, C., Lennox, L., and Bell, D. (2013). A Systematic Review of Evidence on the Links Between Patient Experience and Clinical Safety and Effectiveness. *BMJ Open*, 13(3).

<sup>vi</sup> Laurence, J., Henderson, S., Howitt, P.J., Matar, M., Al Kuwari, H., Edgman-Levitan, S., and Darzi, A. (2014). Patient Engagement: Four case studies that highlight the potential for improved health outcomes and reduced costs. *Health Affairs*, 33(9).

<sup>vii</sup> Carman, K.L., Maurer, M., Sofaer, S., Adams, K., Bechtel, C., and Sweeney, J. (2013). Patient and Family Engagement: A framework for understanding the elements and developing interventions and policies. *Health Affairs*, 32(2).

<sup>viii</sup> International Association for Public Participation's *Public Participation Spectrum* (2008).

<sup>ix</sup> Canadian Institutes of Health Information's Strategy for *Patient-Oriented Research* (2014).

<sup>x</sup> Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada *Guidelines on Public Engagement* (2016).

<sup>xii</sup> Baker, G. Ross, Judd, M., and Maika, C. (Eds.) (2016). Patient Engagement: Catalyzing Improvement and Innovation in Healthcare.

<sup>xiii</sup> Baker, G. Ross, and Denis, Jean-Louis (2011). Medical leadership in health care systems: From professional authority to organizational leadership. *Public Money & Management*, 31(5).



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