Interprofessional care — the context

Interprofessional care is part of the HealthForceOntario. Interprofessional care is the provision of comprehensive health services to patients by multiple health caregivers who work collaboratively to deliver quality care within and across settings.

A collaborative, team-based approach to care can be an enabler for improving patient care and meeting the demands that the system is facing. Interprofessional care can be systemically implemented to assist in health care system renewal and improved sustainability. Many work environments suffer from a lack of support for collaborative, team-based care. Improved collaboration and teamwork through interprofessional care will assist health caregivers to work more effectively by helping to manage increasing workloads, reduce wait times and reduce patients’ likelihood of suffering adverse reactions as a result of the care they receive.\(^1\)

There is mounting evidence that an interprofessional care environment may offer multiple benefits, including the following\(^1,2\):
- Increased access to health care.
- Improved outcomes for people with chronic diseases.
- Less tension and conflict among caregivers.
- Better use of clinical resources.
- Easier recruitment of caregivers.
- Lower rates of staff turnover.

Interprofessional care is considered a priority in Ontario’s overall health human resources strategy. In order to develop concrete approaches to implementing interprofessional way at a systemic level, the Interprofessional Care Project was initiated in the Fall 2006 after an invitational summit that saw a groundswell of support for the process. A Steering Committee was tasked with creating a Blueprint that would provide guidance to government, educators, health care workers, organizational leaders, regulators and patients about interprofessional care strategies. The Steering Committee was co-chaired by Tom Closson and Dr. Ivy Oandasan.

The Blueprint calls for a comprehensive approach at the system, organizational, practice and policy levels to facilitate the implementation of interprofessional care in Ontario.

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Blueprint for Action: Implementation Framework

Interprofessional Care: A Blueprint for Action in Ontario (Blueprint) identifies approaches that will help to integrate interprofessional care into existing systems, legislation and infrastructures. The following directions identified should be addressed:

- **Building the foundation:** The building process begins with the education system, which needs to prepare current and future caregivers to work within interprofessional care models. New health care providers entering the system should be trained to provide care in a collaborative environment. Educators at universities and colleges need to incorporate interprofessional education into existing curriculum or develop new curriculum.

- **Sharing the responsibility:** Professions need to review their standards of practice with a view to integrating interprofessional collaborative, team-based care approaches. Professions should practice within their full scope of practice, consistent with safe care. Unions and management should be open to including interprofessional care concepts in collective agreements.

- **Implementing systemic enablers:** Legislation and liability coverage for all health care providers must be reviewed, paying specific attention to the meaning of professional responsibility and accountability within team-based structures.

- **Leading sustainable cultural change:** All leaders must look for ways to integrate interprofessional care into existing strategies. Funding systems should be structured to provide incentives for the adoption of interprofessional care.

In order for interprofessional care to be effectively implemented, these four directions must be coordinated and integrated; work on the directions should be interconnected for maximum effect.

**IPC Implementation Framework**

The Blueprint positions the adoption of interprofessional care as a change-management process and calls on everyone in the health care and education systems to adopt a common vision to improve communication and collaboration, ultimately leading to a more effective health care system in which:
• Patients and their families are part of the caregiving team.
• Patients are confident in the caregiving team’s ability to take care of their health care needs.
• Health caregivers collaborate and communicate effectively.
• Health care settings embrace interprofessional care.
• Infrastructure, funding models and policies exist to support interprofessional care.

**Blueprint Recommendations**

Recommended actions have been identified for each direction as follows:

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<th>Direction</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Recommended actions</th>
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| **A. Building the foundation** | Create a firm foundation upon which key interprofessional care activities can be implemented and sustained. | 1. Define core competencies for interprofessional care.  
2. Clarify roles and responsibilities in an interprofessional care environment.  
3. Develop interprofessional education curriculum models.  
4. Agree on terms and conditions for adequate mandatory liability insurance.  
5. Ensure that patients, their families, volunteer caregivers and acute and community support services have the tools and resources they need to participate actively in care decisions. |
| **B. Sharing the responsibility** | Share the responsibility for ensuring that interprofessional care strategies are effectively implemented among interested parties. | 1. Establish a provincial Interprofessional Care Implementation Committee.  
2. Develop a multi-level accountability framework.  
3. Create a central provincial resource for knowledge transfer. |
| **C. Implementing systemic enablers** | Provide systems, processes and tools that will allow interprofessional care to be taught, practiced and organized in a systemic way. | 1. Conduct a legislative review to identify opportunities for supporting interprofessional care.  
2. Implement interprofessional care accreditation standards.  
4. Incorporate interprofessional care into e-health strategies.  
5. Provide incentives for practicing interprofessional care. |
| **D. Leading sustainable cultural change** | Lead sustainable cultural change that recognizes the collaborative nature of interprofessional care and embraces it at all levels of the health care and educational systems. | 1. Implement a public engagement strategy.  
2. Support interprofessional care champions.  
3. Provide support for interprofessional care and interprofessional education.  
4. Evaluate system performance and outcomes. |

**Implementation plan**

Achieving effective implementation of interprofessional care requires a comprehensive action plan that identifies the roles each partner or participant should undertake. The plan developed in the Blueprint is a starting point as the key parties take ownership of their responsibilities. Collaboration, partnership, communication and teamwork have been the hallmarks of the creation of the Blueprint. These core values will guide the successful implementation of interprofessional care in Ontario.