SOCIAL AND STRUCTURAL VULNERABILITIES PROGRAM
REPORT ON LAUNCH EVENT

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Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

On January 20th, 2021, The O'Brien Institute for Public Health launched the Social and Structural Vulnerabilities (SSV) Program and the Research2SocialAction HUB with a two-part, virtual event. The morning session included presentations from the HUB's co-leads, Cornell University's Project2Gen's Assistant Director for Policy Engagement, and students involved in HUB research. The afternoon consisted of a community engagement session focused on co-developing a research and social action agenda for the HUB. Participants rated research and action ideas related to 'Funding Upstream Strategies', 'Data Sharing', and 'Translating Evidence into Policy' as their highest priority issues. Positive feedback was received on both the morning and afternoon sessions. Our next steps involve formalizing HUB partnerships and governance, planning and implementing activities that align with participant priorities, and initiating two projects to map and understand existing work in this area. The event was recorded and can be viewed at this link.

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ABOUT THE EVENT

Social and structural vulnerabilities research (SSV) was identified as an O'Brien Institute priority in 2017 and has been one of the Institute's most successful areas of research since then. On January 20th, 2021, we formally launched the SSV Program to strengthen and build on the existing foundation of work in this area. Through a multi-pronged approach, the SSV Program will generate and translate knowledge that moves past a focus on individual issues and towards addressing structural inequities.

The SSV Program will (1) Generate and mobilize research on structurally vulnerable families through the inception of the Research2Social Action HUB (the HUB). (2) Develop future leaders in this area by crafting a clear role for our students and trainees in community, where they will participate in research and social action. (3) Support broader SSV research through catalyst funding, infrastructure, and network building.

The formal launch consisted of a two-part virtual event hosted by the O'Brien Institute. The morning session provided an overview of the SSV program, an introduction to a similar model from Cornell University called Project2Gen, and a summary of student research undertaken in SSV. We were also thankful to have Elder Reg Crowshoe, a cultural and spiritual leader from Piikani First Nation, provide an opening blessing for the event.

The afternoon functioned as a participatory community engagement session, where a combination of brainstorming, discussion, and polling was used to prioritize research and social action ideas brought forward by participants. These priorities will set the direction of the Research2Social Action HUB moving forward.

The entire event was recorded, and is available for public viewing on the O'Brien Institute's YouTube channel, accessible through this link.

ATTENDANCE

Invitations were disseminated via the SSV Program mailing list, Street CCRED's (Community Capacity in Research, Education, and Development) mailing list, and the O'Brien Institute and UToday's newsletters. A total of 120 individuals registered for the event. Registrants were affiliated with:

30%   26 different community organizations (n=36)

53%   The University of Calgary, The O'Brien Institute, ACHRI, or other UCalgary units (n=64)

9%   Alberta Health Services (n=11)

3%   Two local governments (n=4)

4%   Four other universities (n=5)

MORNING SESSION

A maximum of 77 participants were present during the morning session. The first presentation was from Drs. Katrina Milaney and Meaghan Edwards, faculty members from the Department of Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies. Drs. Milaney and Edwards outlined the purpose of the SSV program and the Research2Social Action HUB, described the community engaged development process that defined the HUB's mission, and updated attendees on current and future projects. Dr. Elizabeth Day from Cornell University then presented on Project2Gen, an innovative model for family-focused research that involves researchers, practitioners, students, and policymakers. Project2Gen's model informed the development of the Research2Social Action HUB and provided a success story for translating research into policy that positively impacts families. These sessions enabled participants to understand the SSV program's scope, development, and approach to research.

Following faculty presentations, three students spoke about research they completed in conjunction with the Research2Social Action HUB. Each presentation described how different groups of stakeholders wanted to engage with each other on COVID-19 responses. Dr. Meaghan Edwards presented on Jessica Kohek's work that examined the engagement preferences and needs of community organizations. Candace Parsons presented findings on how people with disabilities and their families wanted to interact with other stakeholders to influence pandemic responses. Lastly, Ash Seth presented on

how policy makers wanted to work with community on developing pandemic responses. All presentations were recorded and can be viewed on YouTube at this link.

Table 1 demonstrates the morning session was a success. Most respondents either agreed or somewhat agreed the morning session met its learning objectives (88 – 94%), satisfied expectations (88%), and provided the opportunity to learn something new (88%). Three quarters of participants stated they would be able to apply learnings from the presentations to their work and agreed that there were enough opportunities to ask questions. Open-ended evaluation responses indicated participants enjoyed and valued the SSV Program overview and the guest speaker from Cornell University, Dr. Elizabeth Day. When asked what we could improve for the next event, responses mentioned reducing the length of time on zoom and increasing the time allocated to breaks. This valuable feedback will inform the structure of future events.

Table 1. Proportion of evaluation responses that agreed or somewhat agreed with the following statements regarding the morning session. Total responses = 17.

Question	n	%
The session met its learning objective of participants becoming aware of and building capacity for SSV research.	15	(88)
The session met its learning objective of participants understanding findings from SSV research.	16	(94)
The session satisfied my expectations.	15	(88)
I learned something new from the presentations.	15	(88)
I will apply learnings from the presentations to my work.	13	(76)
There were sufficient opportunities to ask questions.	13	(76)

AFTERNOON SESSION

Approximately 30 registrants participated in the afternoon community engagement session, which aimed to determine research and action priorities for the HUB. To facilitate the session, we utilized an adjusted nominal group technique. In breakout rooms of 3 – 7, participants were asked to individually brainstorm the highest priority

'Big Issue' facing structurally vulnerable families and any research and/or action ideas related to their 'Big Issue'. Each participant then voiced their ideas to the group in a round robin before shifting to open discussion. Breakout sessions concluded with a poll of the participant-generated 'Big Issues' to solidify the highest priorities shared by the group. Due to time limitations, not all groups reached the final stages of this process. We used this method in place of unstructured discussion to provide greater opportunity for all participants to voice their perspectives.

Breakout room facilitators then reported the top two 'Big Issues' discussed in their room to the larger group. The issues relayed by facilitators were entered into a live poll and participants were asked to select up to three issues they viewed as the highest priorities. A total of 16 participants voted in the poll and the results are listed in Table 2. Two voting options, 'Data Sharing' and 'Building Capacity in Data Systems', were collapsed into one category ('Data') during reporting because of overlap in theme. Similarly, the voting option 'Engaging and Empowering Marginalized Populations' was split into two categories ('Engaging and Empowering Indigenous Populations' and 'Relevant Research and Practice for Marginalized Populations') during reporting. The purpose of voting was not to eliminate options, as we recognize that each issue raised by participants has the power to impact structurally vulnerable families. Voting served only to prioritize what needs to be tackled first.

The highest priorities shared by participants included 'Funding Upstream Strategies', 'Data', and 'Translating Evidence into Policy' (Table 2), which all align with the purpose of the HUB. Research and action ideas related to 'Funding Upstream Strategies' included providing direct funding for upstream research on innovative models and studying the interrelated impacts of province-wide systems like Alberta Works, AISH, and Children's Services. The topic of 'Data' generated ideas that fell into two categories: 1) Improving data mobilization and data sharing. 2) Building data infrastructure. Lastly, connecting research and policy was a highly prioritized area. In particular, participants expressed a need for system and program cost-effectiveness studies to influence policy.

TABLE 2.

'Big Issues' facing structurally vulnerable families and corresponding research and action ideas. Ordered by voted priority from highest to lowest out of 16 possible votes. Subthemes are noted in italics where applicable.

'Big Issues'	Votes	Research and Action Ideas
Funding upstream strategies	8 (50%)	• Fund upstream research with innovative models and focus on prevention. • Study the impacts of systems like Alberta Works and Children's Services.

Data sharing	8* (50%)	*Mobilizing and Sharing Data* • Mobilize data and share research to get information to frontline workers. • Reduce lag time in getting data to frontline workers. • Increase access to government data. • Share existing data to improve client experience (i.e. reducing the number of times a client must repeat their story). *Data Infrastructure* • Create best practices for data governance (who collects, who owns, storage, safety). • Strengthen data infrastructure for small organizations. • Map researcher interests and projects to gain understanding of existing data. • Build infrastructure to demonstrate the long-term results of prevention.
Translating evidence into policy	7 (44%)	*Translating Evidence to Policy* • Increase uptake of evidence-based policy at the provincial level. • Focus on translating experiences of families into data that impacts policy. • Facilitate respect, cooperation, and unity between organizations and policymakers. *Cost Effectiveness Studies* • Investigate the cost (in)effectiveness of current systems, particularly the underfunded mental health care system. • Study the cost effectiveness of family reunification programs, including the long-term impact from breaking cycles of separation and trauma.
Engaging and empowering Indigenous populations	5** (31%)	• Build stronger connections with Indigenous populations. • Understand and align with Indigenous Ways of Knowing in our work. • Reduce the disproportionate number of Indigenous children in care.
Relevant research and practice for marginalized populations.	5** (31%)	• Integrate culturally relevant concepts into research and programs. • Build community capacity for culturally appropriate practices in service delivery. • Explore the needs of marginalized populations that receive little research attention (i.e. certain youth populations).

Impact-focused funding, programs, and collaborations	4 (25%)	*Impact-Focused Systems* • Investigate what a well-operated system of care actually looks like and needs. Determine the elements that contribute to a well-functioning system. *Impact-Based Funding Reform* • Fund impact, rather than individual programs or projects. • Increase funding to track long term outcomes. • Reduce 'pilot funding' models and mentality to increase long term programs.
Restrictive funding	3 (19%)	*Specific Underfunded Areas* • Increase funding for grassroots initiatives. • Reinforce the social safety net. • Increase funding to the FASD support sector. *Accessing and Utilizing Funding* • Create new models to determine what is funded, how funding is utilized, and who decides how funding is utilized. • Decrease bureaucracy involved in accessing funding.
Breaking down silos (communication, coordination)	2 (13%)	• Increase coordination between community organizations. • Build partnerships and connections across communities and silos. • Research how to connect various silos.
Access to and treatment within acute care	2 (13%)	*Causes and Effects of Unacceptable Acute Care* • Study client maltreatment and under-treatment in acute care settings. • Demonstrate effect of maltreatment on client perception of acute care and willingness to seek acute care. • Research acute care workers attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness. *Capacity Building for Acute Care Workers* • Provide training for acute care workers that is led by people with lived experience in homelessness. • Provide training in self care and burnout-reduction for frontline workers as a means to improve care for marginalized populations. *Access Issues* • Increase access to mental health care for people experiencing homelessness and poverty.

Housing	2 (13%)	• Address the provincial deficit in affordable housing and lack of housing that meets family needs.

*This category was originally two different categories during voting. The voting score reflects the higher number of votes received.

**These categories were lumped together in voting. The combined category received five votes.

Breakout room facilitators took detailed notes, providing additional information about the issues raised by participants in the smaller discussions. Though the following issues were not voted as the highest priorities, participants discussed several important areas. Participants raised specific issues related to SSV that should be studied, including:

- FASD and its relationship with homelessness.
- Poverty and its intersections with global challenges like COVID-19 and climate change, as well as policy that addresses poverty (i.e. guaranteed income).
- Stigma and its relationships with FASD, homelessness, mental health, and substance use, as well as the impact of stigmatizing language in policy and used by policy makers.
- Social isolation and mental health issues faced by structurally vulnerable families.

Breakout room facilitators also noted participant recommendations for specific research approaches. Participatory action research and the 'nothing about us without us' principle were viewed as especially important. Participants expressed interest in creating community-engaged scholarship best practices to guide work undertaken by the HUB. Lastly, one group discussed factors that should be incorporated into the HUB's family lens. Specifically, we should consider the intersection between poverty and child services, incorporate a generational perspective, and include companion animals as part of the 'family' definition. These recommendations can apply to any research and action activities undertaken through the HUB.

We received positive feedback on the afternoon session, with nearly all respondents indicating that the session met its learning objectives (89%), satisfied expectations (89%), provided opportunities to voice opinions (100%), and respected the opinions of participants (100%) (Table 3). Eight of nine respondents agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement 'my opinions and concerns were reflected in the final ranking activity', indicating the direction of the HUB's research and action agenda is aligned

with community perspectives. It will be key moving forward to maintain alignment as activities are planned and implemented.

Table 3. Proportion of evaluation responses that agreed or somewhat agreed with the following statements regarding the afternoon session. Total responses = 9.

Question	n	%
The session met its learning objective of participants connecting with each other and building relationships.	8	(89)
The session met its learning objective of participants developing research and action priorities for the Research2Social Action HUB.	8	(89)
The session satisfied my expectations.	8	(89)
I had the opportunity to voice my opinion.	9	(100)
I felt my opinion was respected.	9	(100)
My opinions and concerns were reflected in the final ranking activity.	8	(100)

Respondents provided valuable feedback to help us improve future events. One participant noted that more time for discussion, and an unstructured discussion would have been preferable. Two responses mentioned that more emphasis should have been be placed on work already being done. This is important feedback to guide the HUB moving forward. In the 'Next Steps' section of this report, we highlight two projects that will support this goal.

NEXT STEPS

The SSV Program and HUB's next steps include formalizing partnerships and governance, planning research and action activities, and initiating two projects described in the morning session's program overview.

To formalize the HUB's partnerships and governance, we are launching a multi-layered partnership framework designed to meet stakeholder needs. The framework is based on

a November 2020 stakeholder survey and includes three, mutually inclusive categories of partnership. The broadest category, **Network Members**, receive communication materials and event invitations. **Collaborative Partners** are involved in a specific initiative or student learning experience that addresses the research and action priorities described in Table 2. Lastly, **Governance Partners** will participate in leadership roles, guiding HUB activities through regular meetings, strategic planning, and decision making. Anyone can request to join any partnership level. For more information on the HUB's partnerships and governance, please see our partnership framework document.

We will convene three structures within the **Governance Partners** category, including a *Families Advisory Council,* an *Elders Advisory Council,* and a *Steering Committee* composed of community organization representatives and UCalgary researchers. The first task for Governance Partners will be to plan activities that align with the priorities identified by participants, including 'Funding Upstream Strategies', 'Data Sharing', and 'Translating Evidence into Policy'.

As described in the morning session's program overview, the HUB is initiating two projects in the coming months (pending funding). The first project is a Social Network Analysis of community-engaged scholarship at UCalgary. The purpose of this project is to map existing partnerships between UCalgary entities and community, as well as initiatives relevant to structurally vulnerable families in Calgary. The second project is a literature review of SSV research. This review will provide the academic foundation needed to position the HUB, providing insight into research and social action occurring in this area across Canada. Both projects seek to build a firm understanding of existing work in SSV so we can build on and support initiatives that are already underway.

Thank You

The SSV Program launch was a wonderful opportunity to connect with community organizations, faculty members, students, and others. We appreciate the time that individuals and organizations dedicated to attending the event.

As we move forward, we will work with all partnership levels to plan and implement activities related to the research and action priorities expressed in Table 2.

If you would like to sign-up to be involved with the SSV Program and the HUB, please email Natasha Hoehn, SSV Research Associate, at nchoehn@ucalgary.ca.