O'Brien Institute for Public Health

A Healthier Future for All Members' Forum 2023

Members' Forum Poll Results

January 23, 2024

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Overall Summary

Annual Members' Forum

On November 22, 2023, the O'Brien Institute for Public Health launched the Health Equity HUB at its annual Members' Forum, inviting people from the community, academia, and government to engage in a discussion about health equity work in Alberta. At this forum, the attendees were asked to reflect on six questions about the future role of the O'Brien Institute and the Health Equity HUB. This summary offers a high-level summary of your responses. Please see the full report for more details.

What we asked:

1) What are the **Key systemic disparities** are in our public system?
2) What is the **role O'Brien Institute for Public Health researchers** should play to address these disparities?
3) What are the **priority policy areas/needs** that the O'Brien Institute might collaborate with partners to address?
4) How should the institute ensure **policy reform is meaningful and relevant** to people being served and how to measure success?
5) How should interested parties **work together** to tackle structural issues?
6) What are the practical steps the O'Brien Institute can take to achieve **national leadership** and elevate its reputation as a leader in action-focused health equity?

What you said:

1 – Key Systemic Disparities in our System
- Inequitable access to supports
- Economic disparities
- Social and cultural differences

2 - Role of Researchers
- Act as connectors
- Be facilitators of information and awareness
- Be advocates and priority setters

3 - Priority Policy Areas to Address
- Improved cross-jurisdictional relationships
- Aging-related issues
- Universal basic income
- Planetary health
- Competitive structures
- Data access across jurisdictions
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Health equity
- Health system resource distribution
- Homelessness
- Income support
- Knowledge translation and evidence-based decision-making
- Language translation
- Social determinants of health
- System integration
- System navigation
- Trust in health care system

4 - How to Make Reform Meaningful and Relevant

- Engagement with various interested parties (i.e., communities, academics, government)
- Ongoing measurement and evaluation to show impact

5 - Working Together for Action

- Take a relationship-based approach (building trust, transparency, stronger collaboration, clearer communication)

6 - Achieving National Leadership in Action-focused Health Equity Research

- Be clear with the HUB's purpose
- Be loud and take action
- Give opportunities to collaborate and connect

What is next?

Over the next six months, the Health Equity HUB leaders and partners will gather to set out next steps that take into account the insightful feedback from the Members' Forum. You can expect communication from the team by Fall 2024.

Thank you for your helpful feedback. It will be invaluable as we move this ever-important health equity work forward.

Introduction

On November 22, 2023, the O'Brien Institute for Public Health held its Annual Members' Forum to launch the Institute's Health Equity HUB. The aim of the forum was to discuss the HUB's purpose and to strengthen community partnerships to advance health equity and try and fill gaps between issues, evidence, practice, and policy. The forum was attended by students, staff and faculty from the University of Calgary, government, and community agencies. At the close of the event, the attendees were asked to discuss six questions that were intended to help HUB organizers plan for the future of the O'Brien Institute. The attendees submitted responses as groups via an online polling platform called Slido.

The current summary report provides the results of the Slido poll broken down by question. The forum gathered 180 attendees. The following is a summary of the results including a word cloud and the themed responses to six questions posed to the attendees at the conclusion of the forum.

Word Cloud

The Members' Forum participants were asked to type in the word(s) that came to mind when they thought of "health equity". The results as depicted in a word cloud are below. The larger and darker the word in the cloud, the more prominently the word was featured in the responses. In this cloud, Justice, Access, Accessibility, and Inclusion were the leading words that came to mind for participants when thinking of "health equity".

Key Findings

There were six areas that the participants were asked to reflect on including the

1) **Key systemic disparities** in our public system.
2) The **role** that the **O'Brien Institute for Public Health researchers should play** to address these disparities.
3) The **priority policy areas/needs** that O'Brien might collaborate with partners to address.
4) How the Institute should **ensure policy reform is meaningful and relevant** to people being served and how to measure success.
5) How interested parties should **work together** to tackle structural issues.
6) The practical steps the Institute can take to achieve **national leadership** and elevate its reputation as a leader in action-focused health equity.

For each question, several themes arose which are summarized below.

1) Key Systemic Disparities

There were three key systemic disparities that the participants discussed in this section including:

Inequitable Access to Supports

Participants identified inequitable access to supports as a significant systemic disparity. This included four sub-themes: structural issues within the healthcare system, insufficient mental health care, the importance of health literacy, and challenges related to physical proximity to services, including transportation needs.

Structure of the health system:

"Patients are told to find services themselves not introduced to them by service providers"

"Medical education does not teach empathy to future providers"

"[We need] early prevention in all public systems. We need decision-makers and policymakers who are accountable [for issues of inequity]."

Lack of mental health care:

"Health care, specifically, mental health care is a big concern for me. I am encountering many people who are struggling from depression, anxiety, ADHD, etc. We need a better system to support mental health patients."

Need for health literacy:

"Health literacy is a big one. Education and awareness improve access.

Economic Disparities

The second systemic disparity that was emphasized by attendees was economic disparity which comprised the lack of a living wage, widespread poverty, and unemployment.

Need for a living wage:

"We need governments to cap rental costs and provide wages that allow people to live."

Poverty and unemployment:

"High rates of burnout largely because front life staff are experiencing poverty and housing risk themselves."

"High unemployment rates and lack of income to meet basic needs."

Social and Cultural Differences

Social and cultural differences also came up as a key systemic disparity in our public system contributing to health inequity. Social and cultural differences mentioned by attendees involved general differences in experience and world view, as well as racial, linguistic and other types of diversity that go unacknowledged and under-recognized in our current system.

"There is a disparity In understanding the "other."

"[We need to address] language barriers and cultural appropriateness in our services."

"Indigenous worldviews are not always aligned with academia and research practice."

In addition to the above, other key systemic disparities came up in fewer instances including "political party buy-in and representation", "siloed working environments", and "competitive funding structures between non-governmental organizations.

2) Addressing Key Systemic Disparities

The Members' Forum attendees outline three main roles that the O'Brien Institute for Public Health might play in addressing key systemic disparities.

Connectors

The first and most prominent role that attendees emphasized in their responses was for the O'Brien Institute to connect groups and be a facilitator that could liaise between transdisciplinary groups and community members.

"The HUB could act as a consulting group that bridges between researchers and policy, creates opportunities for students to work in areas of policy, build diversified teams, create knowledge pipelines, [and involve] patient partners."

"So many sectors are siloed which can lead to greater separation or lack of communication. The same may be said about resources available to the public. Greater collaboration, education, awareness is necessary. Additionally, transdisciplinary research teams collaborating with community would be useful."

Facilitators of Information and Awareness

Another prominent role that attendees emphasized was for the institute to ensure research can be translated to its recipients and applied to community, and for the institute to enable awareness and knowledge of resources.

"As an apolitical entity, O'Brien should [help by] equipping individuals, leaders, and organizations with the awareness, evidence, and knowledge they need, they will be able to collectively champion change and apply influence where required."

"Change the language. Research is not always conducive to the recipient of the research."

"Helping knowledge translate and make it easier for non-academics to understand the work that is being done."

Advocates and Priority Setters

Attendees also highlighted numerous priority areas where the O'Brien Institute could focus its efforts, underscoring the importance of setting priorities to address key systemic disparities within our current public systems.

"Advocate for policy changes that improve access...train clinicians on relevant issues."

"We need to implement some new ideas to enhance the health care system, specifically mental health, poverty, and homelessness."

"Shift the focus to work towards prevention.

3) Priority Policy Areas

The forum respondents offered a lengthy list of policy areas and needs that they wish the O'Brien Institute for Public Health would collaborate with them on to address.

- Improved cross-jurisdictional relationships
- Aging-related issues
- Universal basic income
- Planetary health
- Competitive structures
- Data access across jurisdictions
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Health equity
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4) Making Reform Meaningful to People with Lived Experience

To make policy and practice reform meaningful to people, the respondents overwhelmingly suggested the need for the institute to consult and properly engage with all levels of government, communities, and most importantly, people with lived experience. The group also emphasized the importance of measuring and evaluating the work being done.

Engagement with various interested parties
"Work with all levels of government with clear policy asks. Make this transparent so that government is accountable that they know this information."

"Support individuals, leaders, and organizations with the tools necessary to engage those that they uniquely serve, using both in-person and virtually, such as an online toolbox, for instance."

"ASK THE PEOPLE!!! We are all different and need to hear each other."

"Consult excluded people, those with lived experience."

Measurement and evaluation
"Need for regular feedback mechanisms."

"Evaluation is critical (showing changes to policy and also understanding what worked and what did not); ensure the right voices are at the table (diverse and inclusive); use AI [artificial intelligence] to support evaluation."

5) Working together for action

The group was asked for ideas on how researchers, government agencies, and community organizations can work together to tackle structural issues including, but not limited to, poverty, racism, discrimination, and violence through innovative policy and practice changes.

A major theme that came from the responses was to implement a relationship-based approach where all interested parties can offer their agendas and be respected with the goal of effective collaboration.

Relationship-based approach

"Apply a collective impact lens where the above collective could define a common agenda in order to reduce health inequities. Each individual and/or organization can then explicitly commit to their respective "mutual reinforcing" activities to help achieve the common agenda. Everyone can play a part."

"Broker relationships across sectors. Accessible research presentation. Getting different people to the table, like a sort of "Tinder" for research where people are matched based on research programs and interests."

"Broker collaboration by offering physical spaces and opportunities to meet. World cafes. Representation of different voices in the community. Informal and formal opportunities that are flexible avenues to discuss change."

"Build strong and trusting relationships that address competing objectives."

6) Achieving National Leadership in Action-focused Health Equity Research

The group produced suggestions that would help the O'Brien Institute for Public Health's Health Equity HUB in achieving the goal of becoming a national leader in action-focused health equity research. The main takeaways from this list were to be clear with the purpose of the HUB, be vocal and lead in action moving forward, and give opportunities for collaboration and connection.

- **Be clear with the purpose**
  - Establish clear goals, outcomes, priorities, plans, and frameworks that are transparent to all interested.
  - Amplify diverse lived experiences in all projects.
- **Be loud and take action**
  - Make presence known in national and international audiences in health equity.

- o Recruit and attract top diverse talent who are working in good ways.
- **Give opportunities for collaboration and connection**
    - o Gathering space (online and in-person).
    - o Partnerships in the community, public, academia, and government.
    - o Build trusting and transparent relationships.
    - o Leverage funding for community programs.
    - o Leverage social media for dissemination, marketing, and connection, updated website, research repositories, media representatives, etc.

Moving Forward

Over the next six months, the Health Equity HUB leaders and partners will gather to set out next steps that take into account the insightful feedback from the Members' Forum. You can expect communication from the team by Fall 2024.

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