

Understanding and Supporting Community Health: Winnipeg Regional Health Authority staff roles in participating on networks, coalitions and boards

Background

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) staff, such as Community Facilitators, Public Health Nurses, Community Health Dietitians, Clinical Nurse Specialists, Healthy Aging Resource Team Facilitators and other health promotion specialists, work to improve population health through community development processes.

The WRHA Community Development Framework¹ is based on models for public participation and guides community development activities for staff at all levels of the organization. The framework includes:

- The support and facilitation of public participation initiatives and local area development;
Because....
 - Community development processes support local communities in defining strengths, assets, problems and strategies for change.
 - Success of community development initiatives must include the provision of, and access to, resources targeted to facilitate grassroots work and local action. In the WRHA, this would include many different contributions, including having staff that can work with the community to support community identified needs and the funding of organizations to support local area priorities.
- The facilitation of networking and intersectoral collaboration;
Because.....
 - The health of individuals and communities is strongly shaped by the social determinants of health. Intersectoral strategies are essential to addressing the root causes of ill health.
 - Different sectors must work together to problem solve issues that impact community health and reduce health gaps between population groups.
- The promotion of organizational development within the WRHA;
Because....
 - We need to strengthen the ability of our organization to support and enable community development practices.
 - Health system culture and mechanisms must shift to be responsive to community views, needs and input. Processes are required to incorporate community knowledge and understanding into decision-making structures affecting health.

Partnerships are an integral component in the WRHA Community Development Framework. Partnerships in communities occur in various forms and structures. WRHA staff, in community development roles, deliver services by becoming involved in community partnership structures to support the process of community development.

The purpose of this document is to outline appropriate WRHA staff roles in boards, advisory committees/groups, networks and coalitions. The expectation is that WRHA staff will use their judgment and if concerned, they would seek guidance from an appropriate supervisor.

¹ WRHA. (2017). Community Development Framework. Available online:
<http://www.wrha.mb.ca/community/commdev/files/CommunityDevelopmentFramework2017.pdf>

Clarifying the Roles of WRHA Staff

“Community development is the process of helping a community strengthen itself in order to improve people’s lives. It addresses issues that have been identified by the community, and builds upon existing skills and strengths within the community” (Vancouver Coastal Health, 2013).

WRHA staff, in community development roles, deliver services by becoming involved in community partnership structures to support the process of community development. They are involved in processes that enhance the ability of agencies, networks, and groups to identify and respond to community issues. They are involved in partnerships to build capacity, facilitate, and support community development processes.

Examples of appropriate ways to support a network, coalition, advisory board or working group could include:

- Supporting organizational or board development, including sharing expertise on roles and responsibilities of a board;
- Facilitating a strategic planning process for a network, coalition, or board;
- Facilitating or participating on a community network or coalition that has the aim of encouraging information sharing, knowledge exchange, and collaboration within a community;
- Connecting and navigating health and social services and community resources; and
- Providing links to WRHA information and resources.

As Boards of Directors may play a governing role in the policy and hiring of an organization, the WRHA Legal Counsel advises (email communication, May 2018):

1. A staff member can only sit on a board as a representative of the WRHA and on work time if the WRHA request them to do so.
2. Other than the situation above staff cannot sit on boards on WRHA work time as WRHA employees.
3. If staff sit on boards on their own time as private citizens, they must ensure they recuse themselves from anything that may put them in conflict of interest with the WRHA.
4. Staff cannot be on any hiring panels for community groups on WRHA time as WRHA employees.

As described above, it is important to differentiate between providing board support (e.g., advice, information sharing) and being a member of a governing board (e.g., setting policy; supporting hiring practices). It is inappropriate for staff to determine direction or policy of a board.

In the situation of a WRHA staff is asked to sit on the board of a WRHA funded agency as a private citizen, the staff should consult with their supervisor to ensure that their role is clear on the board (i.e. that they are there as a private citizen versus a WRHA employee). If there are potential conflict of interests with WRHA, employees would declare and recuse themselves.

Staff should always use their judgment when determining their roles on different advisory boards, networks and coalitions. If WRHA staff appear to, or could be in, conflict of interest they are advised to seek guidance from appropriate supervisor.

Types of Boards, Working Group, Committees

1. Governing Boards

Governing boards, or Boards of Directors, are independently incorporated and are the legal entity and authority for the non-profit organization. In legal terms, the governing board is the organization. It has the authority to govern itself and to create its own rules. Boards of Directors are the governing body of an organization. They decide on policy, and ensure that the organization's policies are carried out.² The board of a nonprofit agency is legally and morally responsible to serve the public good. This includes accountability to the funding source which may be a foundation, government department or another volunteer organization.

Table 1: Examples of Governing Boards

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Klinik Community Health, Canadian Mental Health Association, Good Neighbours Active Living Centre, Rainbow Resource Centre, Manitoba Cardiac Institute (Reh-Fit) Inc., Wolseley Family Place, IRCOM etc. are incorporated, have a Board of Directors who are legally accountable for providing leadership and oversight of the organization. The term governing board usually refers to organizations large enough to employ executive or administrative staff.

2. Advisory Boards, Working Groups, and Committees

Advisory boards, working groups and steering committees are partnership structures incorporated under a host organization. The advisory group is only responsible for the mandate it receives from its host organization. The host organization defines their limits of authority and responsibility. The advisory group has no legal status apart from host organization and has the primary function of providing advice and recommendations. The host organization (e.g., staff, governing board) ultimately make decisions about if and how advice is incorporated.

² For more information visit: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/organizational-structure/board-of-directors/main>
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Table 2: Examples of Advisory Boards, Working Groups and Committees

Our Winnipeg Community Advisory Committee:

Members of this committee advise the City of Winnipeg Public Service on community-based issues, public engagement activities, city-wide priorities, and other OurWinnipeg related issues. Group members explore and refine guiding principles, gaps or opportunities, and resource allocation in the OurWinnipeg review; build relationships with specific sectors, networks, and community members to reach members of the general public who have typically been underrepresented in past planning processes to participate in a meaningful way.

Winnipeg Food Council:

Members of the Winnipeg Food Council advise the City of Winnipeg Mayor and Council on food system related issues, support the work of the community on food issues, and initiate the development of, and support the implementation, maintenance and evaluation of a City of Winnipeg Agricultural and Food Strategy to address municipal food security and food system issues.

Gizhe Waa Ti-Sii-Win End Homelessness Service Fair Steering Committee:

Gizhe Waa Ti-Sii-Win Winnipeg is a volunteer-driven, community-based initiative that provides free appropriate services to individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness and those at risk of becoming homeless, on one day and at one location. Gizhe Waa Ti-Sii-Win was initiated by End Homelessness Winnipeg in partnership with the Manitoba Financial Empowerment Network, and agencies in the homelessness service sector. The event is coordinated by End Homelessness Winnipeg as part of its collective approach to address the root causes of homelessness and prevent its occurrence.

Senior Resource Finders Advisory Committee:

These Senior Resource Finders Advisory Committees are often the first point of contact for services for older adults and their families, they focus on support services and referral to help older adults remain independent and develop services specific to local needs. WRHA staff member may sit at these tables in an advisory capacity.

Healthy Together Now Advisory Committee:

The Healthy Together Now Advisory Committee is comprised community representatives from local agencies, local residents, community groups, schools, education partners etc. The Committee reviews grant applications, provides strategic planning and direction, and provides updates to WRHA. The Healthy Together Now Advisory Committee is supported by the Community Facilitator in the area.

Tenant Advisory Committee:

“A Tenant Advisory Committee (TAC) is a group of tenants that provide direction on the programs and activities they would like to see in their residential building for the overall population”.³ The committee provides information, advice, recommendations and planning regarding recreational programs and relevant services that would improve the overall well-being of tenants in their building or housing complex. The Community Facilitator works in collaboration with Manitoba Housing and other external agencies to help strengthen the TAC. It is not the role of the Community Facilitator to handle petty cash or fiscal management of a Tenant Advisory Committee within Manitoba Housing complexes.

³ Manitoba Housing Tenant Advisory Committee Manual 2015:4

3. Networks and Coalitions

A network or a coalition is a group of individuals and/or organizations with a common interest who agree to work together toward a common goal.⁴ The terms “coalitions” and “networks” are sometimes used interchangeably and can be informal or formal. They are often organized around encouraging learning and collaboration, the sharing of ideas and information, raising awareness around what others are doing, finding opportunities for collaboration and working together to develop solutions to complex community challenges. Sometimes there can be a more formal sharing of resources amongst various organizations or groups around an identified opportunity or issue (e.g., sharing of financial resources, shared program development).

Table 3: Examples of Networks and Coalitions

Neighbourhood Resource Network (NRNs):

These are intersectoral networks in some community areas that bring together key stakeholders to share information and collaborate on neighbourhood based initiatives. These were started by the WRHA, City of Winnipeg and various school divisions, and are often chaired by WRHA Community Facilitators.

Network of Organizations working with War Affected Newcomers (NOWAN):

NOWAN is an interagency network with the purpose of connecting people and resources to build settlement and main stream agency capacity to support newcomers, which includes encouraging more opportunities for collaboration and problem solving amongst front line service providers. NOWAN meets its goals through regular meetings and an email group list.

Parent Child Coalitions:

Parent Child Coalitions bring together parents, early childhood educators, educators, health care professionals and other community organizations to plan and work collaboratively to support the healthy development of children aged 0-6 years. Parent Child Coalitions support existing community programs for families with young children and develop new initiatives that reflect each community’s diversity and strengths. Parent Child Coalition partners include Regional Health Authorities.

⁴ For more information visit: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/promotion-strategies/start-a-coalition/main>