



Commitment to Family Engagement in System Planning: Niagara Region Service Area, Child and Youth Mental Health

This commitment charter was co-developed by service providers and families to ensure meaningful family engagement at all levels of system planning in child and youth mental health across the Niagara Region Service Area.

Background

“Consistently delivering a seamless experience and strong outcomes — the care kids need, when they need it, how they need it — is key to helping children and youth in Ontario grow up with good mental health. The 2016 Annual Report of the Ontario Auditor General highlighted a range of opportunities to improve the child and youth mental health system. Woven through the recommendations was a clear reminder that we must focus on the experience and needs of children, youth and families. And there is no one better to tell us what they need than children, youth and families themselves.

Evidence shows that meaningfully engaging youth and families in the child and youth mental health sector can have significant positive impacts on service experience and outcomes. With a voice and an active role in treatment planning and service delivery, Ontario’s children, youth and families have their lived experience and context incorporated into their care. This leads to improved outcomes,² better relationships with healthcare professionals delivering care, a stronger sense that needs are being met through services delivered³ and greater satisfaction with care. When youth and families are engaged in their own care, they experience improved psychological well-being, behavioural functioning and quality of life, and services overall are more cost-effective. Families experience less stress, improved family interactions and more confidence in their ability to support their children and youth through mental health challenges.

Family engagement and youth engagement are essential drivers of excellence across all aspects of the system. Collectively, we are most efficient and effective when we work not just for children, youth and families, but with them, every step of the way.”¹

In order to practice family engagement at the provincial standard, The Niagara Region Service Area, Child and Youth Mental Health (Niagara Service Area) has defined its commitment to meeting the quality areas of family engagement. This Commitment Charter outlines the commitment to Family Engagement by the Niagara Service Area.

This Commitment Charter has been signed by the following Core Service Delivery Providers of Child and Youth Mental Health service in the Niagara Region Service Area:

Pathstone Mental Health

Contact Niagara

Niagara Health

Centre de Santé

Objective: To establish clearly defined commitments to family engagement that align with the Provincial Standard of Family Engagement in the Niagara Service Area.

¹ Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health (October 2019). Quality Standard for family engagement in system planning. Ottawa., ON. Available online:

http://excellenceforchildand youth.ca/sites/default/files/standards_normes/draft_family_engagement_quality_standard.pdf

Niagara Service Area Values:

Collaboration
Inclusivity/Diversity
Patience
Respect
Empowerment
High Quality Standards of Care

Niagara Service Area Strengths:

Collaborative Community Partnerships
Commitment to Families, Children, and Youth
Flexibility/willingness to change
Passion and Dedication

Benefits of Family Engagement:

- ❖ Cultures of engagement create supportive workplace environments that allow:
 - Collaboration
 - Trust
 - Cohesiveness
 - Partnerships
 - Respect
 - Increased staff satisfaction
- ❖ Positive outcomes for children, youth, and families
- ❖ Improved system/organizational sustainability
- ❖ Reduction in stigma

Navigating the document:

The Niagara Service Area Commitment Charter is designed to align with the Provincial Standard of Family Engagement. Each commitment area aligns with each of the ***quality statements*** of the Provincial Standards.

Words or phrases throughout the document that are ***bold, italics and underlined*** are defined at the end of the document in the “Glossary of Terms”.

Special thanks to the ***Core Implementation Team*** for the contributions to the commitment charter and ongoing work in implementation planning:

Bill Helmeczi, Director Strategic Initiatives, Standards, Practices – Pathstone
Nadine Wallace, Executive Director, Contact Niagara
Kristen Hendry, Resource Coordinator, Contact Niagara
Lise Corriveau, Mental Health Counsellor/Team Coordinator, Centre de Santé
Olivia Fabiani, Therapist, Pathstone
Kathy Wlodarczyk,, Registered Psychotherapist, Trauma Therapy Program, Niagara Health
Health Ranger, Crisis Worker, Children’s Clinic, Niagara Health
Jackie Frans, Family Member
Linda Grubic, Family Member

Provincial Quality Standard of Family Engagement

Pursuing excellence demands that we define it. Quality standards are essential to systems that are accountable and constantly improving as well as central to ensuring high quality mental health services. Quality standards consist of quality statements that describe what high quality looks like based on evidence. Quality standards complement accreditation standards and clinical practice guidelines. Together, these standards and guidelines provide the way to have the best mental health outcomes for everyone involved in the child and youth mental health system.

Engagement at the system level is focused on improvements beyond a single organization. The quality standard for family engagement is beyond the delivery of care of improving programs. Family engagement can occur along a continuum, the quality standard aims to achieve the highest level along the continuum – **co-development and partnership**.

Family Engagement Quality Standard

Family Engagement is defined as ***an ongoing process that includes families as active decision makers and partners at the organizational and system levels.***

Family engagement at a system level is focused on improvement affective networks, pathways, resources and structures rather than individual organizations. However, for a system to be family engaged, organizations within that system must also adopt and apply consistently the standard of family engagement.

Quality Statements – Family Engagement

Co-Development: Families have the opportunity to jointly develop with other partners all activities and processes that impact or are important to them

Commitment: Organizations and other partners, especially those in leadership roles, value and demonstrate their commitment to family engagement

Communication: Communication among family and other partners is timely, transparent, respectful, and accessible

Diversity and Inclusion: Family engagement processes represent and value the diversity of the communities served

Empowerment: Family experience, expertise, and perspective is respected and clearly reflected in system planning and improvement efforts

Ongoing Learning: Families and other partners understand the principles and practice of Family engagement have accessible, ongoing opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills

Partnership: Families are an essential part of the decision-making process and have equal say in decisions that impact them with other partners

Research and Evaluation: Families and other partners have the opportunity to jointly research, evaluate and make ongoing quality improvements, including client engagement processes

Niagara Service Area's Commitment to the Provincial Family Engagement Quality Standard

Co-Development: The Niagara Service Area commits to ensuring that families have the opportunity to jointly develop all activities and processes that impact or are important to them in child and youth mental health planning and implementation.

- The Niagara Service Area will co-develop with families an implementation and evaluation plan to ensure:
 - Families are embedded in decision-making processes
 - Families are communicated with and invited to mental health and community planning tables.
- The Niagara Service Area will establish a Regional Advisory to support families and service providers in meaningful partnerships and engagement throughout decision-making processes.

Commitment: The Niagara Service Area leadership commits to being accountable in embedding families in system planning and improvement efforts, and providing the necessary supports to uphold this commitment charter.

- The Niagara Service Area will co-develop a Commitment Charter that is accessible to community partners and families that:
 - defines the standard of family engagement and;
 - how the service area will be accountable to establishing and maintaining a high standard of family engagement.
- The Niagara Service Area will invest in dedicated staff to support the vision, implementation and evaluation of family engagement.

Communication: The Niagara Service Area commits to timely, transparent, respectful, and accessible communication between all partners.

- The Niagara Service Area will embed processes to co-develop communication to ensure it is transparent, respectful, and accessible.
- The Niagara Service Area will use accessible and shared language throughout its communications with partners including families.

Diversity and Inclusion: The Niagara Service Area commits to practices that are inclusive and ensure that the diversity of partners is valued and engagement is representative of the communities served.

- The Niagara Service Area will provide ongoing learning opportunities to increase capacity in cultural safety, competencies and anti-oppressive practices.
- The Niagara Service Area will place a priority on eliminating barriers, respecting diverse needs and utilizing an integrated approach to engagement.
 - The Niagara Service Area will ensure a Regional Advisory that is diverse of perspectives and is representative of our geography and communities served.

Empowerment: The Niagara Service Area commits to trusting, respectful relationships that enable family experience, expertise and perspectives to be clearly reflected in system planning and quality improvement efforts.

- The Niagara Service Area will work with families and signatories of this Charter to identify and address barriers that exist for meaningful empowerment.
- The Niagara Service Area will ensure empowerment at all levels of system planning to ensure equal empowerment of families and service providers.

Ongoing Learning: The Niagara Service Area commits to promoting and supporting a shared understanding of the philosophies and practices of family engagement throughout the service area by having accessible and continuous learning opportunities for all partners, including families.

- The Niagara Service Area will support families and community partners by providing opportunities for knowledge sharing and mentorship.
- The Niagara Service Area will ensure family engagement expertise is embedded in system planning at all levels of design, development and implementation.

Partnership: The Niagara Service Area commits to embedding families as essential partners, collaborating in all decision-making processes.

- The Niagara Service Area will co-develop and support a Regional Advisory for access by organizations to ensure meaningful partnerships with families.
- The Niagara Service Area will promote a shared culture of engagement that promotes and supports partnerships between all community partners, including families.

Research and Evaluation: The Niagara Service Area commits to family partnerships to research, evaluate, and make ongoing quality improvements in all aspects of system planning.

- The Niagara Service Area will support families to participate meaningfully as co-developers and co-evaluators of research and evaluation.
 - Establish and maintain a system to track research and evaluation opportunities and partnerships with families.
 - Ongoing co-analysis of data with families will be carried out to inform all aspects of system.
- The Niagara Service Area, together with families, will identify and adopt a standardized tool to measure and evaluate the engagement of families.

We the undersigned acknowledge and accept the outlined commitment to upholding a standard of Family Engagement throughout the Niagara Service Area, Child and Youth Mental Health and agree to be accountable to this commitment.

Dated

Signed:

Glossary of Terms

Anti-oppressive practice: Approach that encourages diversity, prioritizes the needs and strengths of marginalized groups and works to transform structures that create inequities.

Co-Development: The process of working collaboratively on a shared purpose; joint decision making; a commitment to action and collective accountability among all stakeholders.

Commitment: A willingness to persist in a course of action; a sense of obligation to stay the course; the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, etc.

Communication: The exchange of thoughts, messages or information between people or among a group of people, using spoken languages, body language, tone of voice and gestures. Effective communication occurs when there is a shared understanding; in other words, the message that is received and understood is the same message that was sent.

Core Implementation Team: A core team is established at the beginning of the planning phase and oversees the entire implementation process including the development of the implementation plan.

Culturally appropriate practices: Practices that are responsive to the cultural concerns of racial and ethnic minority groups, including the language, histories, traditions, beliefs and values.

Culture: Share experiences of people, including their language, values, customs, beliefs, worldviews, ways of knowing, and ways of communicating. Culturally significant factors encompass, but are not limited to race/ethnicity, religion, social class, language, disability, sexual orientation, age and gender.

Diversity: A broad term that refers to the variety of differences among people, often within the context of culture, education, organizations or workplaces.

Empowerment: The process of enhancing the capacities or abilities of individuals to influence or make informed choices and to transform those choices into desired actions or outcomes.

Evaluation: Systematic collection and analysis of information to understand whether a project, service, or process is doing what it was intended to do and how well (or not) it is doing so.

Family: A circle of care and support that offers enduring commitment to care for one another related biologically, legally, emotionally, or culturally and takes into account those who the person with lived experience considers significant to their well-being.

Inclusion: Striving for equity and maintaining a culture where difference within the collective is embraced, respected, accepted and valued; the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of participation for those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.

Ongoing Learning/Learning Opportunities: Coaching, training, or other learning events; supporting the pursuit of knowledge and skills to achieve a goal; building on strengths among individuals, organizations, and communities.

Partnership: A collaborative relationship between two or more people. People or organizations in a partnership collaborate to advance their mutual interests. A partnership involves sharing individual skills and resources, while working together towards a common goal.

Quality Improvement: Systematic approach to making changes that lead to better outcomes and stronger health system performance. This approach involves the application of Quality Improvement Science, which provides a robust structure, tools, and processes to assess and accelerate efforts for the testing, implementation, and spread of QI practices.

Quality Statements: The quality standard for family engagement in child and youth mental health system planning is comprised of eight quality statements. These statements intersect and work together to form high quality family engagement. It is important to pay attention to all areas to ensure strong and sustainable family engagement practices.

Research: The process of creating new knowledge or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. This includes synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it leads to new and creative outcomes.

Transparent: An open flow of information, and clarity about decisions.

**Definitions as identified in the Provincial Quality Standard for Family Engagement. Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health (October 2019). Quality Standard for family engagement in system planning.*