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The focus of this newsletter is Optimizing Coalition Functioning

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed it is the only thing that ever has." (Margaret Mead)

Mead's words speak simply and eloquently about the power of "small groups of committed citizens" and "change".

At least 37 "small groups" focused on change exist throughout Ontario. They are the Heart Health Coalitions. Heart Health Coalitions aren't trying to change the world – at least not in the foreseeable future. They certainly are agents of change who have a lot to offer Ontario communities.

The goal of Heart Health Coalitions (HHCs) is "to achieve population-wide behaviour change" as stated in the Ontario Heart Health Program (OHHP) mandate. A primary vehicle of change is the coalition – community partners working together across Ontario.

A natural extension of influencing change is to experience change oneself. It became apparent several months before the workshops that the Coalitions themselves needed tips and strategies that would assist them to change effectively within their communities. And so, the idea of a workshop on "Optimizing Coalition Functioning" began to take shape.

A Planning Committee led by the Heart Health Resource Centre set out to design and deliver the workshops. Along with its partners, The Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse (OPC) and RBJ Health Management Associates, the Committee decided early on that the workshop would focus on core elements for optimizing coalition functioning. The core elements were identified as themes:

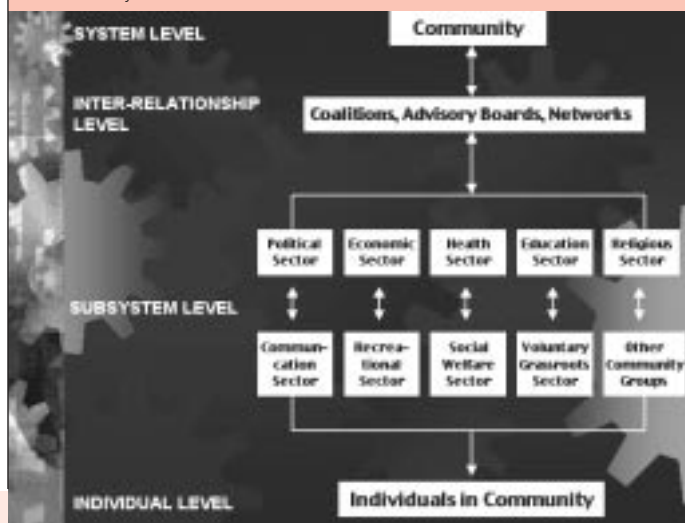
Coming Together (optimizing membership)
Growing Together (optimizing operations)
Changing Together (optimizing future directions)

The purpose of this newsletter is to tell the story of the workshops. In so doing, it highlights some of the content and processes included in the workshop. It also features some of the collective wisdom of the participants who offered ideas on how to optimize the functions and directions of coalitions.

Why Coalitions?

Coalitions can be powerful mechanisms for change. And community coalitions in particular have the potential to be both effective and feasible (Green and Ottoson 1994, Hancock 1994, Green et. al., 1996) vehicles for accomplishing great work.

It is no accident that the implementation model chosen by the OHHP centres around the establishment of 37 coalitions throughout Ontario. This model makes the best use of all available resources and focuses limited resources where they are most likely to achieve results.



It also allows for community participation and direction setting. Coalition members include a variety of community partners who come together to create a shared vision and plan for affecting health behaviours and social and physical environments. They do this within the context of a complex system as shown in Figure 1 below.

There are countless stories of coalition experiences to learn from and build upon. In the area of Heart Health, there are the landmark studies such as Minnesota, Stanford, and Finland (Elder et. al., 1993). Maurice Mittelmark and colleagues (1993), in their analysis of exemplar heart health programs state that "the core of a successful program is the community organization process". Their comment is a compelling endorsement of the value of coalitions and the work they do.

Figure 1

How Can the Research Help Optimize Coalition Functioning?

In summing up what the research tells us about coalitions, three points are offered. First, most of the research can be described as "wisdom literature" that focuses on internal operations such as membership, leadership, and relationships. This wisdom literature is a rich resource of experiences – tried and true – from health promotion coalitions, much like the Heart Health Coalitions.

Secondly, there is no single model that is best for structuring a coalition. The context is key to choosing the most appropriate model. Most coalitions begin with a structure that is most familiar to their members. Over time, they either stick with it, or change it if it isn't working. The key is to remain open to the need for examining structures from time to time.

Finally, one way to examine the need to change is to use self-assessment tools. Self-assessment tools can be very useful for self-reflection and correction. They are helpful in describing where you are at a given time and can provide fairly quick feedback on aspects that need to be changed.

Self-Assessment Tools and Coalitions

The most recent research on coalitions is about self-assessment tools. The literature identifies some strengths and limitations of using self-assessment tools to describe coalitions. The strengths include:

- Useful for planning, reflection and values clarification
- Provide a snapshot of coalition functioning

At least one limitation of self-assessment tools is that they are unable to address serious conflict issues.

What Does Research Tell Us About Coalitions?

Research on coalitions covers a variety of areas. The workshops included a brief overview of the research that can help inform coalitions and guide them in what they do and how they do it. The main areas of coalition research that have been studied include:

- Types of coalitions
- Indicators of successful coalitions
- Factors influencing coalition functioning
- Self-assessment tools

Types of Coalitions

The research on typology of coalitions (how to categorize or group coalitions) points to four features that define coalitions:

- 1 Membership
- 2 How the coalition was formed
- 3 The types of functions within coalitions
- 4 Types of coalition structures

There is no single best type of coalition and the same coalition may change several times during its lifespan. Most importantly, the type of coalition needs to be developed by its members, and it needs to be shaped by its purpose and local conditions (e.g., opinion leaders, opponents).

Indicators of Successful Coalitions

When it comes to describing successful coalitions, the research identifies two dimensions of success: process and outcomes.

Successful coalitions tend to have the following characteristics of "process":

- effective leadership
- member participation
- task focus
- cohesion and identity
- low membership turnover

In the area of "outcomes", successful coalitions are able to:

- create and sustain health promotion programming
- clearly articulate benefits to coalition members

Factors Influencing Coalitions

There are many factors that influence coalition functioning, such as:

- Goals
- Member participation
- Leadership
- Human and financial resources
- Degree of membership turnover
- Internal relationships
- External relationships

In order to optimize coalition functioning, members must continually examine and assess progress and opportunities for improvement related to each of the above factors. More on this later under "Growing Together" and "Changing Together".

Linking Evaluation and Practice

Linking evaluation and practice is not a new concept. Making it happen though is much less common. The OHHP provincial evaluation is mainly for provincial decision-making about the future of heart health in Ontario. Another important purpose for the evaluation is to help with programming decisions at provincial and local levels. The workshops on coalition functioning offered a great opportunity to share some information that might be useful for local projects.

Participants were encouraged to remember one main point about how to link evaluation and practice. The point was to use the information to ask questions about their current practice. The research reveals that no single model is best for coalitions. That means that the evaluation is not assessing coalitions against a single "ideal". Rather, the evaluation is intended to capture the OHHP wisdom, so that coalitions can reflect on possible areas for growth. This wisdom comes in the form of information such as estimated numbers of coalition members, some successes and challenges with coalition functioning and some opinions on changes happening in Ontario communities.

Figure 2, 3 and 4 show data from the June 30, 2001 report from coalitions. There is one slide for each "theme" of the workshop to give a flavour for the type of data that was collected.

For each slide, participants were encouraged to look for links from the data to their own coalitions.

1 For membership (Figure 2), they were asked:

- What sectors might be a priority for recruitment?
- 2 For operations (Figure 3), several questions prompted discussion:
 - Were any of these barriers operating in their coalition?
 - What barrier/s does your coalition need to overcome in the next 3 months? In the next 6 months?
- 3 For future directions (Figure 4), discussion ensued from the following questions:
 - Were these the impacts participants believed the OHHP was having in their communities?
 - What was one impact or change they'd like to see the OHHP have in their community in years 4 and 5 of the OHHP?
 - What about longer-term goals?
 - Are all coalition members focused on the same desired impacts?

SECTOR	# (%) OF MEMBERS
Public health agencies	382 (15)
Voluntary/health agencies	230 (9)
Community health centres	79 (3)
Other coalitions/networks	223 (9)
Education	250 (10)
Day care/nursery schools	33 (1)
Community centres/recreation facilities	128 (5)
Local government agencies	139 (6)
Other government agencies	63 (3)
Private sector workplaces	122 (5)
Retail outlets	33 (1)
Restaurants/food industry	76 (3)
Health care	185 (7)
Police/law enforcement agencies	9 (<.5)
Media	63 (3)
General community agencies	200 (8)
Community members	192 (8)
Other	68 (3)
TOTAL:	2,475

Figure 2

FACTOR	# COALITIONS IN WHICH
Low visibility	2
Workload too large	2
Turnover of members/volunteers/co-ordinator	2
Lack broader provincial strategy (e.g., communication)	2
Lack of funds or restrictions on use	2
Challenges in covering a large area	1
Very diverse population	1
Lack of understanding of health promotion	1
Differing mandates and priorities of agencies	1
Defining role of coalition	1
Lack of leadership at local coalition level	1

Figure 3

IMPACTS	# COALITIONS IN WHICH
Increased availability of programs and services for heart health promotion	12
Strengthened relationships among community agencies	5
Increased collaborative activities/partnerships among agencies	5
Increased staff knowledge and skills for heart health promotion	4
Increased community awareness of heart health coalition and heart health programming	4
Increased healthy behaviours in community (e.g., walking, healthy eating)	4
Enhanced or increased quality of programs and resources	2
Decreased duplication of resources and projects/increased efficiency	2
More environments for physical activity	1
Activities have a synergistic effect/consistency of message	1
Increased skills in general population re: risk factors for heart health	1
Increased planning/evaluation/budgeting/marketing/management skills	1
Increased joint planning/co-ordination	1
Sustainable activities	1

Figure 4

Decision Balance for Partnering

	COALITION	PARTNER
ADVANTAGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -possible meeting space -can help with access to information and research -can assist in promoting events to the community -may provide access to technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -may increase library's visibility -can promote community presence of the library
DISADVANTAGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -may not be perceived as traditional health partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -may strain human resources

Figure 5

Questions to assist in optimizing membership

- Does your existing coalition membership satisfy the foundation for comprehensive representation?
- Why would someone want to be part of your coalition?
- What do you expect of individuals and organizations?
- What is the "price" of membership?
- Would members report that being part of your coalition is enjoyable and rewarding?

Coming Together

The first core element of the workshop focused on the theme called "Coming Together". This part of the workshop was designed to explore a fundamental aspect of coalition functioning – membership. Coalitions were interested in all aspects of memberships, from getting members to keeping members – and keeping members engaged. Four tips for optimizing membership were offered:

- Review existing membership
- Review the benefits of membership
- Review expectations for membership
- Review plans for celebrating

Since most of the coalitions represented were established, as opposed to new organizations, the workshop focused on what they could do to re-vitalize existing membership. Many coalitions were sensing that their members were tired, still committed to the issues, but feeling somewhat unfulfilled in their attachment to the coalition. One activity that stimulated a lot of discussion and interest was an exercise that used a tool called "Decision Balance for Partnering" (see Figure 5). The tool is useful in determining the relative advantages and disadvantages of membership in the coalition and to the coalition. In filling out the four quadrants, participants could see how membership is viewed from the perspective of the individual and of the coalition. Many participants saw this as an exercise they could use at their next meeting.

Another area of membership that resonated strongly with participants was the aspect of celebration. Participants reported that they get so busy "doing the work" of the coalition that they fail to see the value of celebrating even small accomplishments. Others said that what kept them fresh and vital was the recognition of the importance of celebration and looking for opportunities to acknowledge successes. Clearly, members need and want to enjoy the experience of being on a coalition and celebration must be an integral part of the ongoing activities.

One of the ways that the workshop proposed optimizing membership was to consider the benefits of membership from the viewpoint of prospective members. Seeing benefits for them (in addition to benefits for the coalition) can really change the way new members are recruited. By asking "What's in it for an individual (or organization)?", coalition can start to articulate an enticing proposal for expanding the membership.

It takes small steps on a consistent basis to ensure vital membership in a coalition. Waiting for a crisis of membership makes the task monumental. Instead, keep in mind the four steps for optimizing coalition functioning and ensure that the coalition is in the regular practice of preserving its most vital asset – its members.

Dryden workshop participants and Facilitator Barb Riley



Growing Together

The second core element, Growing Together, focused on the operational aspects of coalition functioning, also known as process factors.

These include:

- Leadership
- Communication (Internal and External)
- Conflict resolution
- Decision-making
- Policies/laws/regulations

Coalitions need to constantly reassess and re-examine each factor to determine what is working well in each area and what needs some fine-tuning.



Sault Ste. Marie workshop participants

Participants at the workshops were very aware of the struggles and accomplishments relating to the operational aspects of their coalitions. Most coalitions become so busy in the "work" of the coalition that they forget to examine the foundations that allow them to be productive. Through discussions participants shared what is working well, what coalitions are struggling with, and heard how to address the struggles. Below are some highlights from the discussions on various process factors.

Leadership

Participants reported that coalitions with strong leaders are individuals who:

- understand the process well
- involve others by sharing leadership and are not into "control"
- recognize the diversity in membership and inspire various members to contribute
- are knowledgeable, flexible, charismatic, and good listeners
- have a sense of humour
- show respect
- are motivated and committed

Coalition members are also very aware of what weaknesses exist around leadership. They talked about struggles coming from unbalanced leadership, lapses in leadership or high turnover in leadership, and lack of a defined role for the leader. The challenge for coalitions is to first identify the struggle and then to create a workable plan for addressing the difficulty.

Some of the suggestions around optimizing leadership include:

- Spend time early on to define clearly the role and expectations for your leader/leader
- Have in place a process for succession to avoid lapses in leadership
- Encourage a leadership style that involves all members in making decisions
- Ensure your chair/leader is well-versed in the issues you are immersed in

Communication

Communication is a core operational factor. Both internal and external communication channels need initial attention and careful planning, then ongoing assessment that takes into account the impact of the communication.

Some of the communication mechanisms that are working well for coalitions include:

- Using a newsletter as a way of letting the community know what's going on
- Using current technology such as creating a website
- Using email to communicate efficiently and easily
- Launching social marketing campaigns to give profile and gain support

Often, good communication (whether internal or external) happens when the "basics" are tended to. This includes:

- Keeping communication simple by using clear, unambiguous language
- Ensuring everyone who needs to get the message, does
- Following previously agreed upon distribution channels

Process Factors

- Understanding the community
- Community development
- Leadership
- Communication
- Research and evaluation
- Sustainability

Contextual Factors

- Connectedness
- History of working together/customs
- Political climate
- Policies/laws/regulations
- Resources
- Catalysts

Action Planning Worksheet

This tool was used by participants throughout the workshop to identify four simple, concrete steps that they could implement upon return to their communities. Participants saw the tool as a valuable and practical resource that synthesized the workshop content at an individual level.

Area	Notes
Using the Framework	
Changing Together	
Changing Together	
Changing Together	

Figure 6

Ten Strategies for Change

- 1 Flood system with communication in all forms.
- 2 Be as visible and accessible as possible.
- 3 Don't underestimate the true magnitude of change: best case scenario, things will get better, the worst is over unless you are positive that it is.
- 4 Lead from the heart, follow with the head.
- 5 Integrate new people into roles and teams.
- 6 Select immediate performance goals for small wins.
- 7 Check regularly with teams on shared purpose and direction. Don't assume the direction is clear.
- 8 Encourage the expression of opposing views.
- 9 Give credit for initiative and risk-taking, whether successful or not.
- 10 Nurture innovation and encourage creative problem-solving approaches.

Changing Together

The last section of the workshop, Changing Together: Optimizing Your Coalition's Future, presented workshop participants with the opportunity to anticipate future trends, issues and circumstances. This was a very timely discussion since the workshops were happening at a time of uncertainty. Coalitions had developed their sustainability plans and were looking into a foggy future. Naming some of the challenges and opportunities of the future was a helpful and productive exercise. Participants found it helpful to acknowledge that they can influence some things and not others. A significant take-home message was that uncertainty doesn't have to lead to paralysis. Instead it can lead to empowering decisions about what actions coalitions can take to plan for an uncertain future.

Here are the discussion highlights on potential changes:

- Leadership in the province might change
- Provincial and national shift to chronic disease prevention
- Increased awareness of the social determinants of health and the potential impact on programming
- Stronger link between heart disease and poverty
- Uncertainty with respect to continued provincial funding
- Population growth in Canada
- Post Sept. 11, 2001, people's priorities have shifted, increased focus on family, friends, health and well being

Participants were asked to imagine how their coalitions could strategize or prepare to address these potential changes. Their responses included:

- Get on the political agenda with respect to the social determinants of health. Establish connections with politicians
- Coalitions should be increasingly taking on an advocacy role to get policies in place for the future (sustainability)
- Invest in workplace health because of changing demographics
- Develop a Plan A and Plan B with respect to funding – might need revenue generation plan
- Recruit partners in chronic disease arena, such as diabetes, cancer, stroke
- Continue to work to get health promotion and prevention on the radar screen as opposed to dedicating the majority of dollars to treatment
- Invest time in partnership nurturing

Participants recognized that the nature of the Heart Health Coalitions would likely change over the next several months. They admitted that anticipating and responding proactively to change was a good approach, even though it might be difficult at first.

Thunder Bay workshop participants



Workshop Location and Organizers

The workshop was delivered in six different locations across the province. A big thank you goes to those Heart Health coordinators who agreed to organize the workshop in their area. The following folks did a fantastic job of promoting the workshop, taking care of registration, arranging the venue, lunch and refreshments for the day. Great job!

Date	Location	Organizer	# of Participants
October 30, 2001	London	Kerry Price	26
December 10, 2001	Dryden	Phyllis Anderson	15
December 11, 2001	Thunder Bay	Anne Ostrom	10
December 14, 2001	Fergus	Karen Armstrong	13
January 15, 2001	Toronto	Lucia Bresolin and Vicki Shienfield	33
January 22, 2001	Sault Ste. Marie	Alison Dutkewicz	17



Lisa Mitchell, Mary Martin Rowe, Barb Riley

The Agenda

9:00 a.m.	Welcome
9:10 a.m.	Overview of Workshop and Opening Activity
9:30 a.m.	Coalitions: What the Research Tells Us
10:30 a.m.	Break
10:45 a.m.	Coming Together: Optimizing Your Coalition's Composition
12:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 p.m.	Growing Together: Optimizing the Work of Your Coalition
1:45 p.m.	Group Work
2:30 p.m.	Break
2:45 p.m.	Changing Together: Optimizing Your Coalition's Future
3:15 p.m.	Group Work
3:45 p.m.	Reflections and Evaluation
4:00 p.m.	Adjourn

The Partners

The HHRC, RBJ Health Management Associates and the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse pooled their talents and resources to offer the workshop.

The Workshop Team

Workshop participants benefited from a team of three dynamic trainers:
 Paula Stanghetta, Workshop Consultant and Facilitator, Heart Health Resource Centre
 Barb Riley, RBJ Health Management Associates and Project Director, OHHP Provincial Evaluation
 Mary Martin Rowe, Health Promotion Consultant, Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse

Resources

For copies of slides from the workshops log on to the revised HHRC website www.HHRC.net

Self-assessment tools:

www.health.nsw.gov.au

www.cacsh.org

Goldstein, S.M. Community coalitions. A Self-assessment tool. American Journal of Health Promotion, 1997; 11(6): 430-435.

American Journal of Community Psychology 2001: 29(2)

Up-Coming Events

Health Promotion in Action:

Embracing the Winds of Change, the 9th annual Ontario Health Promotion Summer School, **June 24-27, 2002**, Pre-School Session June 23 at the Institute for Learning 3550 Pharmacy Avenue, Toronto. Conference is sponsored by the Centre for Health Promotion University of Toronto and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Canadian Public Health Association 93rd Annual Conference "Our Environment Our Health" in Yellowknife, North West Territories, **July 7-10, 2002**. The Explorer Hotel Co-sponsored by the Northwest Territories/Nunavut Branch, CPHA Refer to the website for program updates www.cpha.ca

Take the 1st Step to "Get Active" and "Do a Little More, More Often"! It's time to kick the can again and have fun and fitness in the summer time. **SummerActive 2002** is being held between **May 8th and June 21st** and this year's program promises to be filled with lots of exciting events and prizes! Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) is pleased to be your provincial host of SummerActive 2002 in Ontario. Check the ActiveOntario website for more information at www.activeontario.org

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the following Advisory Group members whose time and energy shaped the workshops:

Allyson Davis, Heart Health Coordinator (Hastings and Prince Edward Counties)
Amanda Kroger, Heart Health Coordinator (Waterloo)
Kerry Price, Heart Health Coordinator (Perth)
Alicia Hammond, Heart Health Coordinator (Muskoka-Parry Sound)
Anne Lessio, Manager, Heart Health Resource Centre.

Paula Stanghetta, HHRC, Mary Martin Rowe, Health Promotion Consultant, Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse, Barb Riley, RBJ Health Management Associates & Project Director OHHP Evaluation, Lorna Heidenham, Executive Director Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, Huguette Jacobson, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care rounded out the workshop team.

Thanks to the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care for funding to support the workshops.

Feedback From Workshop Participants

Participants consistently rated the workshops as good or excellent. Across regions, people indicated that they were satisfied with the workshops. Almost all participants reported that they thought that they would be able to use knowledge and skills gained from the workshop. Some of the strengths identified by participants included that workshops were practical and that people appreciated the materials and tools that were made available.

Depending on an individual's perspective, what could be conceived as a strength or a weakness was the fact that many of the workshops included a diverse mix of participants. Some workshops included coalitions other than those from Heart Health, such as injury prevention, tobacco and nutrition. For some participants, the more diverse audience was most welcome. New people and issues provoked new ideas and insights. For others, the diversity took away from a more focussed, streamlined discussion in the area of heart health specifically.

Here are a few quotes from participants:

- "Presenters well prepared"
- "Vocabulary was too technical"
- "Not enough time for group work"
- "Spend less time on theory"
- "Good balance of facts and stories"
- "Well organized"

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A Newsletter from Ontario's Heart Health Resource Centre

@heart is published regularly to provide up-to-date heart health news from around the province for anyone who is interested in heart health promotion. The status of communities implementing heart health programs, developments at the Ministry of Health, heart health news from across Canada, and information about useful resources will be reported in @heart.

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Your comments and suggestions are appreciated. Please address all correspondence to the Editor, @heart, at HHRC