



# LONG-TERM SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF HEALTHCARE IMPROVEMENT GUIDE

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January 2021

Canadian Foundation for **Healthcare Improvement**

Fondation canadienne pour **l'amélioration des services de santé**





## About The Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement

CFHI works shoulder-to-shoulder with partners to accelerate the identification, spread and scale of proven healthcare innovations. Together, we are delivering lasting improvement in patient experience, work life of healthcare providers, value for money and the health of everyone in Canada.

CFHI is recognized as a leader in patient, family and caregiver engagement. Since 2010, we have led collaboratives and championed partnerships with patients and families to improve quality across the continuum of care.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Long-Term Success and Sustainability ..... 1**
- Introduction..... 4**
- Promoting Sustainability and Long-Term Success of a Healthcare Improvement Initiative .. 6**
  - 1. Take a Team Approach ..... 6
  - 2. Establish Multiple Measures to Assess Improvements Over Time..... 8
  - 3. Create a Sustainability Plan..... 8
  - 4. Create opportunities to regularly convene your team and others ..... 9
  - 5. Embed the new practice ..... 10
  - 6. Adapt the healthcare improvement initiative over time ..... 10
- Additional Resources ..... 11**
- Endnotes ..... 12**



# INTRODUCTION

This resource will inform your plans to implement a healthcare improvement initiative that creates lasting improvement in patient, family and/or caregiver experience, health, and/or work life of providers. The information in this Improvement Resource was compiled from a variety of resources identified in the reference list, including Health Quality Ontario's Implementing and Sustaining Change primer,<sup>1</sup> and is based on CFHI's work leading partnerships to sustain and spread proven innovations.

## How To Use This Resource

This resource is to be used in the initial planning phases of an improvement initiative, as well as during the implementation, evaluation, sustainability and spread stages. Review and discuss the information in this resource with those responsible for leading the improvement initiative, including patient, family, and/or caregiver partners, and staff who will be impacted by or who can influence the change. Then, with your team, consider the following:

- Document plans and actions to implement the healthcare improvement initiative. CFHI's [Healthcare Improvement Planner](#) is a resource to use to create detailed plans, to achieve healthcare improvement goals.
- Develop the measures your team will collect, monitor and report during the healthcare improvement initiative, to show if the changes being made are having a positive impact. CFHI's [Measurement for Improvement Resource and Planning Template](#) is a resource you can use to create your measurement plan.
- Create plans to support your long-term success and sustainability goals, after you have achieved evidence that your improvement is demonstrating lasting improvement. CFHI's [Long Term Success Tool and Action Planner](#), based on the Long-Term Success Tool created by Laura Lennox et. al (2017),<sup>2</sup> can help create detailed sustainability plans in the middle and later stages of an improvement initiative.

## What is Sustainability?

In the context of healthcare improvement, sustainability has been achieved when:<sup>3</sup>

- New ways of working and improved outcomes have become the norm
- Work culture has shifted so the change is part of daily practice, rather than a new, "add-on"
- Gains from the improvement initiative are maintained without reverting to previous ways of doing things and adapt over time to reflect new evidence
- Many people continue to benefit from the improvement

## How and When Should You Plan for Sustainability?

Planning for sustainability is important during all phases of an improvement journey – including in the planning and early implementation phases. Defining long-term success and sustainability goal(s) at the beginning of an improvement initiative will allow you to assess progress and adapt as your initiative progresses. The checklist below provides examples of sustainability goals that will support sustainability (e.g. how will you embed the practice to make it easy to do?).



## Checklist: Example Sustainability Goals for a Healthcare Improvement Initiative

### Example Sustainability Goals for a Healthcare Improvement Initiative

- Maintain and strengthen partnerships and/or develop new partnerships.
- Improve working relationships with partner organizations, patients, families and caregiver partners and other stakeholders.
- Ensure initiative activities continue as common practice and reach more people.
- Maintain continued benefits for patients, families and others with lived experience.
- Engage staff and people with personal experience as key advisors for the improvement initiative (e.g. help to identify key issues and important improvement outcomes from their perspectives).
- Share ongoing experiences for continuous improvement and adaptation of sustainability plans (e.g. updates at staff meetings and visual displays).
- Improve efficiency (e.g. makes jobs easier; fully embed the new practice into everyday practice so it's no longer perceived as a "new" initiative).
- Spread and embed the improvement in new contexts through continued adaptation.
- Continue or increase the awareness of the problem or issue.
- Gain further funds to continue the initiative and maintain improvements.
- Spread the initiative to reach and benefit more people.
- Maintain and strengthen new practices, procedures and/or policies.
- Expand skills.
- Engage leadership.
- Other (specify):
- Other (specify):
- Other (specify):
- Other (specify):

CFHI's [Healthcare Improvement Planner](#) and the [Long-Term Success Tool and Action Planner](#) provides detailed information and reflection questions related to the goals listed in the checklist and can be used to create detailed sustainability plans.



# PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY AND LONG-TERM SUCCESS OF A HEALTHCARE IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE

The list below provides tips and resources that can support sustainability and long-term success of a healthcare improvement initiative throughout the improvement journey (implementation, evaluation, sustainability and spread).

## 1 TAKE A TEAM APPROACH

**Establish and partner with a diverse team responsible for planning, implementing, evaluating and sustaining your improvement initiative.**


Early and ongoing engagement from people who will benefit from, and/or who can influence success of, the new practice will help ensure the initiative is ready to be implemented and sustained.<sup>4</sup> Convene a small team of patient and family partners and inter-professional staff with diverse skills, professional backgrounds, cultures and perspectives to promote shared understanding of the opportunity for improvement, including:

1. **Patient, family and caregivers**, who have the time, resources and accountability to:

- Bring perspective on how the new practice can improve their personal experience, outcomes and/or safety and the experience, outcomes and/or safety of others
- Advise on education, evaluation and sustainability and long-term success planning and adaptations over time
- Fulfill leadership roles, such as members of governance committees, evaluation and leads to develop and identify what needs to change, why and how
- Help ensure a diverse set of lived-experience perspectives are consulted and considered (e.g. people of different ages, and from different cultures and different socio-economic back-grounds), to ensure shared understanding of the opportunity and strategies for the improvement
- Serve as champions for other patients, families and staff, to ensure the lived experience perspectives are fully considered and incorporated

2. **Senior Leaders**, who have the time, resources and accountability to:

- Ensure the initiative is, and remains, a strategic organizational priority (this will justify associated staffing and budget allocations,<sup>5</sup> and can increase the chance it will sustain through competing priorities)
- Support culture change to identify how people feel about the initiative and ensure it is introduced in a way that acknowledges and responds to the concerns of everyone affected
- Champion, role model and set expectations for partnership with people with lived experience (including providing fair compensation and removing barriers for participation)
- Ensure staff have the time, resources and infrastructure to support the change
- Champion the initiative with staff, board members and other stakeholders
- Create/inform and support processes to ensure appropriate oversight and monitoring



3. **Interdisciplinary Staff**, who have the time, resources and accountability to:

- Bring perspective on how the initiative will change/improve their work life and the outcomes for patients and families
- Identify solutions for challenges, such as the possibility that staff may not agree the initiative is necessary, feel that other initiatives should take priority, or feel that extra work will be required
- Identify ways to document and build the new practice into existing practices and processes, such as new employee orientation, job descriptions, policies and guidelines.
- Help establish processes to monitor and support adherence to the new practice and identify opportunities for further improvement
- Serve as champions and mentors for their peers to ensure key staff perspectives are considered throughout the quality improvement initiative


In addition, team members should include:

4. A **team lead**, who has time, resources and accountability to:

- Coordinate and oversee the day-to-day activities
- Serve as a key coordinator and motivator of the team
- Ensure regular and ongoing communication with staff, patients, caregivers and relevant committees/councils

5. An **evaluation and measurement lead**, who has time, resources and accountability to:

- Support the tracking and reporting of results over time
- Support progress reporting and sharing within the team
- Support the team to understand and interpret data over time to inform whether changes are leading to tangible improvement



## 2 ESTABLISH MULTIPLE MEASURES TO ASSESS IMPROVEMENTS OVER TIME

Measurement tells you if the change implemented is having a positive impact, informs needed adaptations and inspires continued change. To support sustainability of an improvement initiative, it is important to:

1. **Choose measures and an evaluation plan in partnership** with people who will be impacted by the change, including patients, family and caregiver partners, staff and others. For example, in CFHI's [Appropriate Use of Antipsychotics](#) collaborative, staff and families met to identify how to measure success. Important success indicators included reductions in falls, improvements in social engagement, and reductions in time required to assist with activities of daily living (due to increased independence/mobility of people living with dementia). These measures, identified by the families and staff, proved to be important motivators for staff.<sup>6</sup>
2. **Communicate realistic expectations** about when improvements are expected in each of your measures. Many healthcare improvement initiatives will not produce evidence of benefits quickly.<sup>7,8,9,10,11</sup> Creating clear, realistic expectations about when improvements are expected in each of your measures can help to reduce the chance that people will get discouraged and disengaged with the initiative.
3. **Identify measures likely to show benefit early in the initiative**, to promote commitment and prevent disengagement.<sup>12</sup> Patient, family and staff stories of improved experience are often found sooner than changes in numerical data and can be powerful motivators for change.
4. **Have a process and someone accountable for monitoring and reporting** on results regularly.<sup>13</sup> This can inform adjustments to the practice (e.g. if negative consequences are detected), and can help to identify new measures to track over time.

CFHI's [Measurement for Improvement Resource and Planning Template](#) contains information that can help you identify measures to collect, report and monitor during a healthcare improvement initiative.

## 3 CREATE A SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Plan for sustainability at the beginning of your initiative and create more detailed sustainability plans after there is evidence of reliable improvement. CFHI's [Healthcare Improvement Planner](#) and [Long-Term Success Tool and Action Planner](#) can be used to guide sustainability planning efforts.





## 4

# CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO REGULARLY CONVENE YOUR TEAM AND OTHERS

Regularly meeting with your team and others who will be impacted by and/or who can influence the improvement will keep the initiative top-of-mind, allowing you to create opportunities to learn, share and plan together can support sustainability through, for example:

- Maintain relationships and commitment to support the improvement, while promoting sharing of implementation strategies, resources, policies, challenges and solutions.
- Communicate the benefits of the improvement.
- Identify partnership opportunities and strategies to share results and champion the initiative.
- Provide ongoing education and opportunities to ensure staff have the skills and confidence to embed changes into routine practice.<sup>14,15,16,17</sup> In education efforts to promote sustainability, consider:
  - Identifying people who will be champions/educators/mentors for their peers with the same roles; this can increase understanding of the need for change and how the new practice will impact a person's day-to-day work life.
  - Share resources to reinforce the learnings (e.g. pamphlets, posters, short videos).
  - Evaluate education to make sure it is developing the skills needed.
  - Provide opportunities to practice skills through role-playing within group sessions. This can promote cross-staff learning and relationship building, and can give people a safe space to discuss and solve anticipated problems.<sup>18</sup>
  - Ensuring active participation from leadership which can improve staff engagement and provide a first-hand opportunity for leaders to hear staff concerns and mitigate them.<sup>19</sup>
- **Celebrate successes** to maintain and renew interest and passion. After initial success of an improvement initiative, passion and interest can easily decrease. On-going opportunities to collaborate, discuss and celebrate the improvement initiative can maintain and renew interest and passion. Example ways to maintain and renew interest and passion includes:
  - Host an anniversary celebration of the initiative launch.
  - Collect and share achievements and stories of impact from patients, families, care partners, staff and others.
  - Establish a process and/or create a committee accountable for planning celebrations and meetings.



## 5 EMBED THE NEW PRACTICE

Here are different ways to embed new practices, to make the new practice the easy thing to do:

- Ensure new processes are documented and built into existing practices and processes, such as new employee orientation, job descriptions, policies and guidelines.
- Establish processes to monitor and support adherence to the new practice. For example, in CFHI's [Appropriate Use of Antipsychotics](#) collaborative, processes included allowing new antipsychotic medications to be prescribed only as 'one time' doses and requiring medication review of all newly prescribed antipsychotics within 24 hours of their prescription
- Discontinue any practices and processes the new practice is set to replace.
- Ensure all staff (including new and casual staff) know what their roles are with respect to the new practice and have the information and supports they need.

## 6 ADAPT THE IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE OVER TIME

Adapting the healthcare improvement to respond to changing needs,<sup>20,21,22,23</sup> new opportunities for improvement and new evidence is crucial. Initiatives that are not adapted to the local context have difficulty sustaining.<sup>24,25,26</sup> Thoughtful and well-planned adaptations are needed to ensure initiatives can continue to deliver intended benefits.<sup>27,28</sup>



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## Example Practical Tools and Information to Support Sustainability Planning

- Health Quality Ontario (2013). [Sustainability Planner Instruction Sheet and Tool](#)
- CFHI's [Long Term Success Tool and Action Plan](#). This is a discussion tool that can be used by teams leading a healthcare improvement initiative to identify risks and strengths of the twelve factors known to impact long term success.<sup>29</sup> This tool includes a template for an action plan teams can use to mitigate identified risks and build on strengths associated with sustainability.
- [The Program Sustainability Assessment Tool](#). This tool published by the Centre for Public Health Systems Science, Washington University in St. Louis, can be used to rate the sustainability of your program or clinical practice.
- NHS [Sustainability Model and Guide](#). The NHS Sustainability Model and Guide can be used to predict the likelihood of sustainability and guide teams to actions to increase the chances that the change for improvement will be sustained.
- [Implementing and sustaining transformational change in health care: lessons learnt about clinical process redesign](#). This paper outlines key criteria for successful use of a clinical process redesign for implementing and sustaining improvement.

## Example Resources to Support Patient and Family Partnership

- [Compensation guidance for patient partners in health care projects](#): This paper was written from the perspective of four Canadian patient partners and provides recommendations for how to remove barriers for participation and ensure a wider perspective of patient partners.
- [Budgeting template for engagement of people with lived experience](#): The George and Fay Yee Centre for Healthcare Innovation has created an Excel template meant to guide development of a budget for patient and family engagement in improvement initiatives.
- [Guidance on taking your patient partnering to the next level](#): Health Quality Ontario developed practical advice on overcoming common challenges with partnering with patients and families in your healthcare improvement efforts.



# ENDNOTES

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