

MENTAL HEALTH PATIENT FLOW IMPROVEMENT PROJECT



Editor’s Summary: In the *Mental Health Patient Flow Improvement Project*, the team from Alberta Health Services focused on the entire continuum of adult mental health services from illness prevention and to community reintegration. Recognizing that the mental health system often involves multiple organizations and support, the initiative is focussing on integrating a network of providers. The project has only recently been initiated and will be evaluated and monitored as it progresses.

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Purpose:	An effective mental health system requires a complex network of services across a broad continuum of care. However this complexity creates a challenge in preventing silos of care and maintaining smooth efficient patient flow from one level of service to the next. Some indicators of patient flow congestion include long waits in the ER, long wait lists for community services, difficulty placing long term care patients and delayed discharges and extended lengths of stay on acute care units. In order to effectively plan and implement a whole system approach to improving patient flow the Mental Health Patient Flow Improvement Project has been initiated. The Project is a two-year initiative focusing on identifying opportunities for improving patient flow processes and helping service teams implement flow improvement initiatives.
Resources:	Operating \$: ____ FTEs: ____1.5__
Source of resource:	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>In kind</i> contributions from the organization <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dedicated internal funding <input type="checkbox"/> External funding (example grant, Ministry etc.)
Population group:	The adult mental health continuum of care
Patient flow entry and end points:	This project is focused on the entire continuum of adult mental health care, from illness prevention and access services through to sustain and support services, such as long-term rehabilitation, housing and continuing care.

Description/ approach:	<p>Key components of the Project's implementation plan and strategic framework include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Documenting and mapping the continuum of mental health care in order to identify patient flow patterns and areas for improved patient flow. (2) Locating opportunities to work with teams to coordinate and implement patient flow improvement initiatives based on sound change management and quality improvement strategies. (3) Promoting a shared vision of mental health care as a whole system of integrated care. (4) Identifying, measuring and reporting key performance indicators for improved patient flow, both at the system and project levels. (5) Establishing the infrastructure, support and motivation necessary to sustain the ongoing planning and implementation of patient flow improvement projects.
Tools and tactics:	<p>A deliverable of this project is the creation of an interactive tool or resource which will represent and map the configuration, operation and dynamics of the mental health system of care, including referral routes, transition processes, lines of communication, and client flow patterns. The intent of this tool is to help managers and service coordinators accurately visualize the interconnected network of services and the nature of patient flow between service levels - thereby contributing to the development of a well informed strategic plan to decrease areas of patient flow congestion.</p>
Critical success factors/ lessons:	<p>For this project a critical factor for success is obtaining system-wide and multi-disciplinary support from key stakeholders and ensuring their active participation in planning, informing and implementing patient flow improvement objectives and initiatives.</p>
Limiting factors:	<p>In order to sustain and expand a system-wide approach to improving patient flow there needs to be an overall work culture and infrastructure that supports ongoing patient flow improvement and system-wide accountability for efficient and effective patient flow.</p>