



Similar Challenges, Unique
Context: My Experience as an
Embedded Researcher Within a
Northern OHT

**OHT Impact Fellowship In-
Person Event**

September 28, 2023

Outline

The Algoma Ontario Health Team (AOHT)

Initial thoughts to advance the OHT through research & potential approach prior to joining AOHT

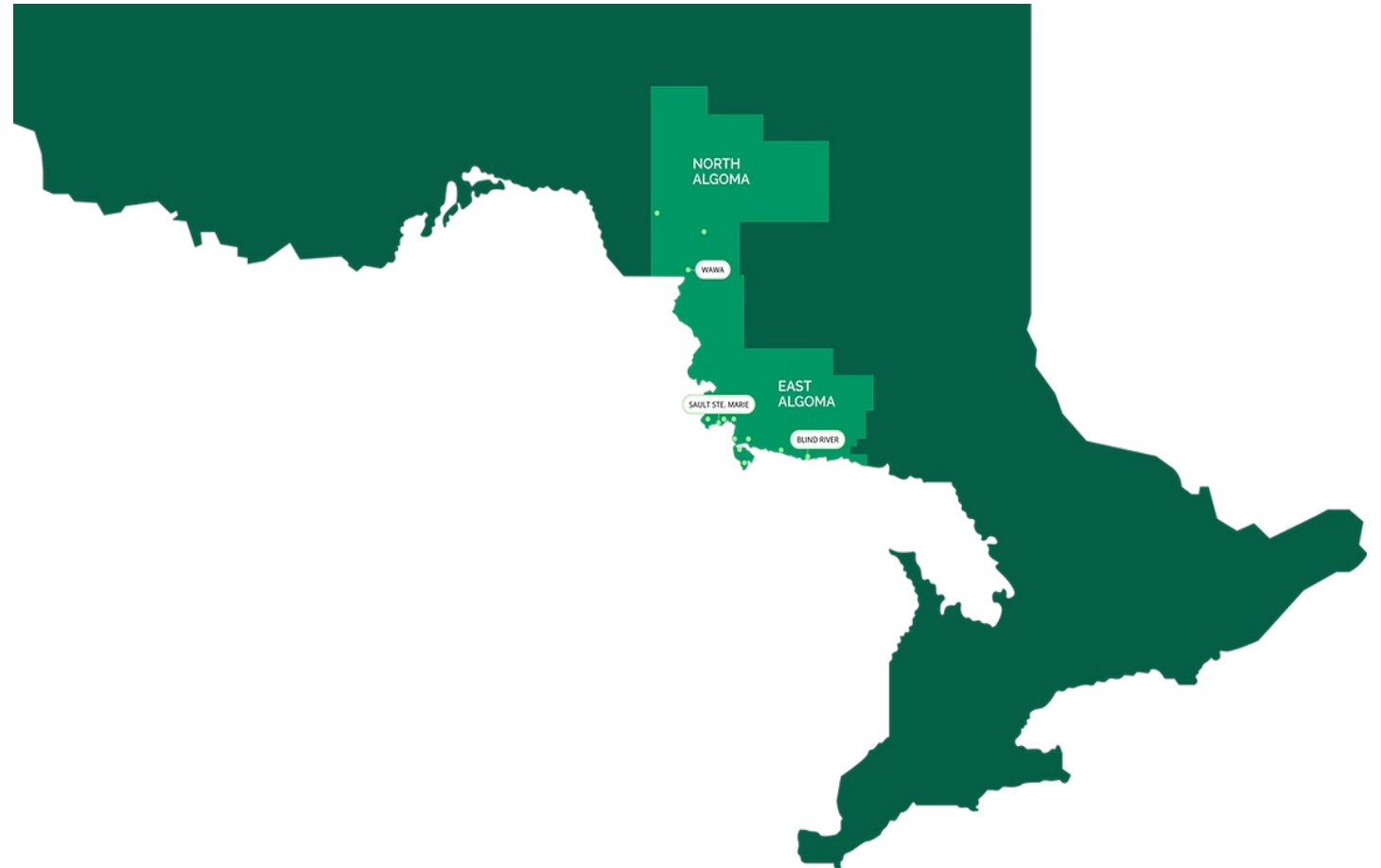
Intersectoral approach for relationship building, networking, stakeholder engagement

Project examples, challenges and successes

Algoma Ontario Health Team (AOHT)

(Source: Algoma Ontario Health Team. (2020). About Us. <https://www.algomaohht.ca/about-us>.)

- 14 partner organizations
- Several collaborators (individuals, organizations) representing health and social services across the region
- Total region covered approximately 32,000 km²
- Nearly 103,100 community members represented
- Over 30% live outside population centre of Sault Ste. Marie



What Challenges Could I Address Through Research?

- Balance numerous and diverse perspectives, health and situational vulnerabilities, conflicting and competing interests of culturally and linguistically diverse populations and communities who have been historically subjected to social exclusion that are spread across vast, vulnerable geography
- Transition ***from*** identifying priority populations ***to*** patient attachment and appropriate, effective engagement and outreach to identify care gaps
- Access issues for in person and digital health services, many of which contribute to health inequities
- Transition ***from*** pandemic response ***to*** recovery

Applied primary care health policy & services research emphasizing rural and northern health systems

Contextually appropriate & relevant innovations

- Do more with less in rural, remote & Northern Ontario
- Local-regional approaches

Approach

- Surveys, interviews, focus groups
- Practice, evidence-informed understanding w/ emphasis on practitioner lived experience

Population health segmentation

- Understand patient populations
- SDH impact on health outcomes
- Patient partnership engagement
- Relationship development
- Trust-building

Approach

- Co-identification and design of priorities, projects, initiatives
- Integrated knowledge translation
- Equity, quality, participatory lenses

Navigate a changing environment

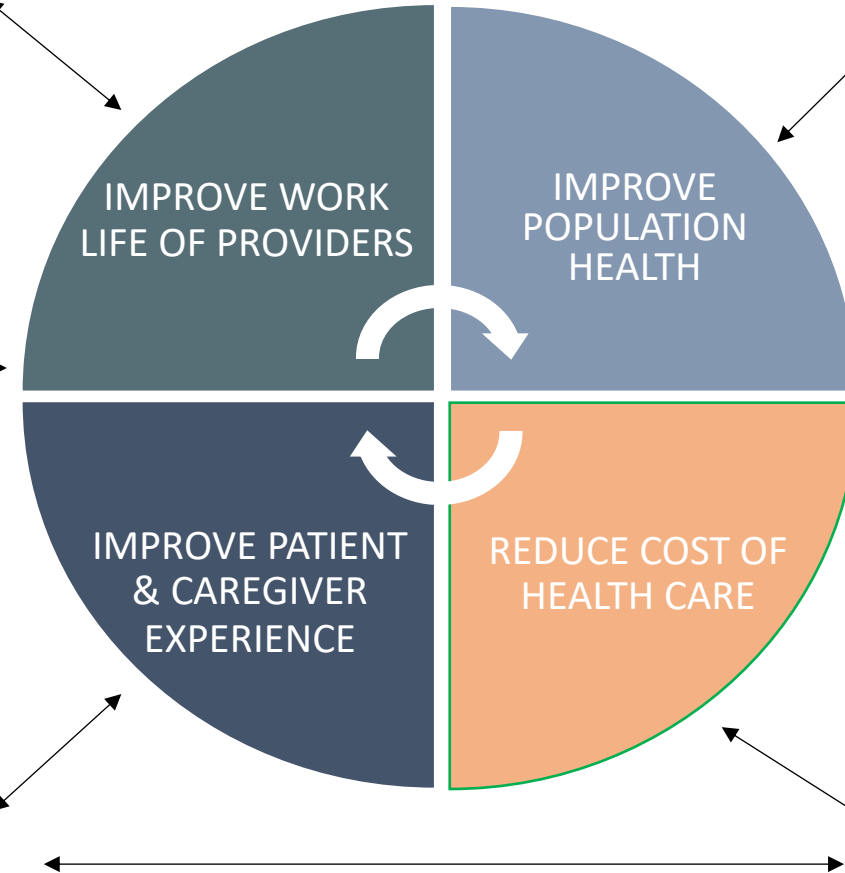
- Developmental research to study OHT processes
- Research & advocacy to address identified needs
 - Health professions education accreditation
 - Health professional regulation
 - Scope of practice

Embrace new approaches to health

- Technology, AI
- Service delivery, privacy maintenance
- Digital health strategies
- Data & information management

Approach

- Critical debrief w/ practitioner, patient, community groups re: virtual care, digital health experiences during COVID-19 to inform future planning



Better Together: Engaging with Fellow Fellows in a Community of Practice

- Maldistribution and chronic shortage of health providers and other support systems
 - Urban, rural, remote areas throughout the region
- Northern Ontario
 - Over 800,000 km² (equivalent to the size of France)
 - 88% of Ontario's land mass
 - 8 urban population centres separated between 150km and 450km of wilderness
- We are too small and isolated to do this work in isolation
- OHT Impact Fellows placed in Muskoka and Bay OHT, Algoma OHT, Rainy River OHT, Kenora All Nations Health Partners OHT, Ottawa Valley OHT
 - Discuss common challenges and shared learnings
 - Build critical mass of expertise in/for our unique contexts
 - Develop relationships and partnerships

Initial Questions

- Northeastern Ontario focus
 - Where are the research pockets?
 - What are the gaps?
 - What are the areas for opportunity?
 - Where are the research tables and what research are they doing?
 - What/where are the research ethics boards?
 - What/where are the advisory committees?
 - What/where are the collaboratives?

Initial Intersectoral Collaboration Targets

- Intersectoral Collaboration with Academic Institutions and Research Centres
 - Laurentian University *Prior to Sudbury and Districts Health Team being approved
 - Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research
 - Algoma University, Sault College
 - Northern Ontario School of Medicine University
 - Dr. Gilles Arcand Centre for Health Equity (NOSM University)
- Primary care engagement strategy (e.g., physicians involved with AOHT also NOSMU faculty)
- Pilot project for an education series (continuing professional development credit)
- Student placements and partial fulfilment of program requirements

Proposed Project to Improve Provider Experiences

Objective: explore the lived experiences of primary care and allied health practices and providers in Northeastern Ontario to understand and identify care and service delivery needs during COVID-19 pandemic recovery

Research Questions

- (1) What challenges are you currently experiencing to provide care or services to your patients/clients, and the communities you serve?
- (2) Did these challenges originate before or since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- (3) What supports and resources do you need to effectively navigate these challenges to effectively do your job?

Participants/Data Collection: Primary care and allied health service providers and practices (AOHT affiliated and unaffiliated) were invited to participate in focus groups

Potential Implications: for primary care and allied health involvement & related to findings which will generate a practice and evidence informed understanding of health service provider experiences emphasizing frontline worker voices

Challenges – Primary Care Engagement & Intersectoral Collaboration

- Capacity limited: chronically under resourced/serviced region compounded by COVID-19 health system stresses
 - Practitioners can't take on anything else without compromising patient care
 - Current workforce relied on to train learners/trainees
 - Burnout
- Trying to increase involvement without disengaging those currently contributing to work
 - Keep calling on the same people to step up
 - Need to clarify roles/commitments for some project work at outset
- Reflective of resource inequities among OHTs?
 - Ability to carry out research, access databases, academic/grey literature without strong ties to academic or research partners

Project to Improve Patient and Caregiver Experiences

Objective: To explore current needs of family and friend caregivers, who are not compensated monetarily, in the Algoma District, to better understand how members of the Algoma Ontario Health Team (AOHT) may support caregiving through health and social services

Research Questions:

- (1) What challenges are caregivers in the Algoma district currently experiencing to provide unpaid care within and outside of health care institutions?
- (2) What supports and resources do caregivers feel they need to effectively continue caregiving duties?

Participants/Data Collection: in person and virtual focus groups with individuals: (1) 18 years of age or older, (2) identifying as a caregiver to an adult living and accessing the health and social care systems in the Algoma district, and (3) not receiving financial compensation for their care duties

Success – Community Engagement, Partnerships, Intersectoral Collaboration

- Co-identification and design of priorities, projects, initiatives
 - Patient, family, caregiver advisors involved throughout the project as research team members from conceptualization to knowledge translation
 - Co-authorship on manuscript in preparation, participation in presentations (e.g., leadership council)
- Understanding populations
 - Research and advocacy to address identified needs
- Relationship development, Trust building
 - Between OHT, partners and caregivers in the District
 - MOU which can be amended for future work with partners
- Overwhelming community response led to local media coverage (*CTV News Northern Ontario, Soo Today*)
 - Effectively assisted with boosting participant recruitment

Thank you!



- Sophia Myles, PhD
- Research Associate, School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies, University of Ottawa
- Research Associate, Canadian Health Workforce Network
- Research Assistant, Faculty of Health Disciplines, Athabasca University
- Email: sophia.m.myles@gmail.com