

Topic Overview

Measuring Health System Efficiency in Canada

Stakeholder Dialogue 7 November 2011

The McMaster Health Forum convened a stakeholder dialogue on the subject of measuring health system efficiency in Canada. With the support of the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the dialogue brought together participants – four policymakers, two past policymakers, five managers and four stakeholders – from across Canada to examine the issue, elements of a model of health system efficiency, and key implementation considerations.



The views expressed in the issue brief and dialogue summary are the views of the authors and dialogue participants, respectively, and should not be taken to represent the views of the funder or the McMaster Health Forum.

Deliberation about the issue

Most dialogue participants saw great value in an effort to measure health system efficiency in Canada, arguing that it could be used as a: 1) complement to service-, program- and institution-based efforts (i.e., micro-level work) to identify opportunities for efficiency gains; 2) spur to intra- and inter-provincial/territorial discussion and learning about the benchmarks to which health systems should aspire and about ‘system drivers’; and 3) corrective to many international comparisons that treat Canada’s health system as a single, monolithic system and not as a set of distinct provincial and territorial health systems, each with sub-sets of semi-autonomous health regions.

Most dialogue participants generally agreed with the issue brief’s description of the challenges encountered in health system efficiency measurement, including: 1) conflicting views about the objective of the health system; 2) conflicting views about and cross-provincial variation in the boundaries of the system; and 3) data challenges in and methodological disagreements about health system efficiency measurement.





Participants drawn from policymaking, managerial, stakeholder and researcher communities gather during a McMaster Health Forum event on 7 November 2011

Deliberation about elements of a model of health system efficiency

The majority of dialogue participants supported an iterative process of developing a measure (and later measures) of health system efficiency, and in the near term: 1) prioritizing the enhancement of health system performance as the objective (and hence output measures such as potential years of life lost); 2) prioritizing healthcare expenditures (i.e., dollars spent) as the principal input; and 3) delegating decisions about particular methods or approaches to data collection to technical experts who should be mindful of a number of principles, namely that a) methods must be appropriate across all regions, b) data collection at the regional level, which is where the key gaps exist, must not ‘take away from service delivery,’ and c) the process of iteratively developing health system efficiency measures and demonstrating their potential uses should not be slowed down or stopped while waiting for the ‘perfect data’ to be collected.

Deliberation about implementation

Most dialogue participants supported the idea that the Canadian Institute for Health Information would accelerate its work on health system efficiency measurement informed by the inputs received through the dialogue. In so doing they reiterated their call for adopting an iterative approach and then building on lessons learned. Several dialogue participants also supported the 10-year vision for developing many models in order to stimulate public discourse about the many different aspects of health system efficiency. A number of dialogue participants noted that a lot of work would be needed in order to provide concrete examples of the types of issues that could be addressed by health system efficiency measurement and the types of implications that could follow from broader discussions about health system efficiency findings.

Dialogue deliverables

To learn more about this topic, consult the [issue brief](#) that was presented to participants before the dialogue, the [summary](#) of the dialogue, and [view](#) or [listen](#) to the interviews with dialogue participants. For an electronic copy of the issue brief or dialogue summary, or to view or listen to the interviews, visit our website www.mcmasterhealthforum.com and click on ‘Products’ along the sidebar, or for direct access to our [YouTube](#) and [iTunes U](#) channels, simply click on the icons below.



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