

Public Engagement Framework



**NL Health
Services**

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Summary

Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) Health Services is mandated to deliver and administer health and community services in Newfoundland and Labrador (*Provincial Health Authority Act*, 2023). The organization envisions health and well-being for every person and every community. To achieve that vision, the organization's mission is not just a statement but a call to action, a commitment to every individual and community: "Working together to improve health outcomes through an innovative, integrated and sustainable health system."

Effective public engagement is a crucial part of our people-centred care framework and is key to achieving improved outcomes across the social determinants of health. By seeking public feedback, NL Health Services doesn't just invite individuals and partners in communities across the province to share their knowledge, perceptions, expertise and resources but acknowledges their invaluable role in shaping our collective health and well-being. This framework also identifies engagement domains - the areas where we encourage public participation. Policies and guidelines will support the organization's comprehensive approach to public engagement.

Contact the Office of Public Engagement, the central hub for all public engagement activities at NL Health Services, for more information on public engagement at NL Health Services.

Why Engage?

NL Health Services is committed to people-centred care. We are focused on treating illness and injury, providing supportive care and rehabilitation, promoting health and well-being, and transforming the healthcare system. We are dedicated to working with people, communities, and partners to improve the population's health and reduce health disparities.

People-centred Care

"...care that is focused and organized around the health needs and expectations of people and communities rather than on diseases." People-centred care pays particular attention to "...the health of people in their communities and their crucial role in shaping health policy and health services."

The World Health Organization

Engagement strategies result in:

- safer, more inclusive care;
- mutual understanding and less conflict;
- deeper, more trusting relationships; and
- stronger, more sustainable decisions.

By seeking feedback on potential decisions, issues and opportunities, we invite individuals, interest holders and partners to share their knowledge, expertise and resources. We ensure that decisions are made with the best possible information, sourced not only from best practices and health data but also from public perception, opinion and experience.

“It is increasingly being recognized that the process through which policy-makers reach decisions is just as important as the outcomes themselves.” - Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

“Engagement with people and communities will be critical if we are to bring about the culture change needed to improve health, health outcomes, and health equity.” - Health Accord NL

*The people-centred care model “...consciously adopts individuals’, caregivers’ and communities’ perspectives as participants in trusted health systems... and includes attention to the health of people in their communities and their role in shaping policies and services.”
- Accreditation Canada*

What is Public Engagement?

At NL Health Services, public engagement is an intentional process of working with publics in meaningful, inclusive, and respectful ways to shape decisions, actions, impacts, or change. It is value-based, people-centred, relationship-focused, goal-driven, and outcome-oriented.

“**Public**” is a broad, inclusive term for all individuals or groups interested in or affected by a decision, plan, or action. Included are:

- **Clients, patients, and families** are those accessing NL Health Services programs at a specific time.
- **Interest holders** are delegated representatives of a government, organization, association, or group with a particular interest in an issue and its outcome. They also include NL Health Services staff, leaders, and physicians. Interest holders play a crucial role in public engagement by representing the interests of their respective groups and ensuring their voices are heard.
- **Community** is a group of people who share a community of place or other identify-forming characteristics such as social ties or common perspectives.



Engagement is Values-based

Values are the internal standards individuals and organizations use to judge events or behaviours as good or bad, right or wrong. Values in public engagement include individual values, community values, organizational values, and process values.

	VALUES EXPLANATION	ENGAGEMENT STATEMENT
Innovation	We are creative and collaborative. We use the talent and ideas of our employees and partners in seeking solutions.	We invite the public to engage with us using new and innovative approaches.
Compassion	We are kind, caring and committed to people-centred care.	We believe those impacted by our decisions have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
Accountability	We are honest, transparent, responsible and serve with integrity. We build relationships based on open communication.	We ensure publics have all the information needed to engage meaningfully and to understand why decisions are made.
Respect	We are inclusive and embrace diversity. We provide care in ways that are fair and reflective of the knowledge, values, beliefs and cultures of the people we serve.	Engagement must respect the voices of those representing our populations and amplify the voices of the most vulnerable.
Excellence	We deliver safe, high-quality care and measure our performance in pursuit of continuous improvement.	Engagement supports sustainable decisions and recognizes the needs of all interested parties and decision-makers.

Guiding Principles

Process values support the sponsoring organization's underlying philosophy of effective public participation. They are reflected in the approach taken, guide interactions and drive 'how we do things,' not just what we do. - International Association of Public Participation

Our guiding principles for public engagement express our process values.

Our engagement is inclusive:

- When we design public engagement, we will choose activities that provide the best opportunity for those interested and impacted to express their views, have their input considered and hear their voices.
- We will actively seek ways to reduce potential barriers to participation.
- We will ensure that all participants have access to the information necessary to understand an issue in accessible formats.
- We will use various tools and approaches to reflect diversity and promote equitable access.
- We will include the affected public in designing public engagement approaches and encourage them to identify involvement techniques that are meaningful to them.
- We will assess and support the organization's readiness to engage diverse voices.

Our engagement is people-centred:

- We will ensure there is every reasonable opportunity for those impacted by a decision to contribute meaningfully.
- We will focus engagement activities on what works best for participants, engaging people where they are.
- Our engagement activities will create a safe environment where all participants feel welcome.
- We will encourage a learning environment in public engagement opportunities; everyone involved should expect to learn from each other's perspectives.

Our engagement is trust and relationship-focused:

- We will engage with the public early in the decision-making process and continue engaging from start to finish.
- We will clearly explain the purpose, goals, objectives and level of engagement, identifying who is making the decision and how public input will be used.
- We will communicate the potential impact of a decision during the engagement process.
- We will ensure that materials developed for public engagement are factual and transparent about the overall objectives and do not misrepresent project goals in any way.
- We will share the feedback received with those who provided it and invite participants to clarify their feedback, if necessary.
- A 'what we heard' document will be available to everyone on the outcome of a public engagement process.
- We will communicate with the public if a public engagement process experiences a delay or challenge or if a decision is delayed unexpectedly.

Our engagement is goal-driven and outcome-oriented:

- When we engage, we commit that the public's contribution will influence the decision or outcome at the level indicated.
- We will be clear about the public's role in the process and the decision to be made.
- We will consider the impacts that a decision may have on the public and will factor that into the decision-making process.
- While we cannot always make the decisions that some may want us to make, we will always explain the reason for decisions to the public.
- We will evaluate public engagement efforts regularly and report internally and externally for continuous quality improvement.

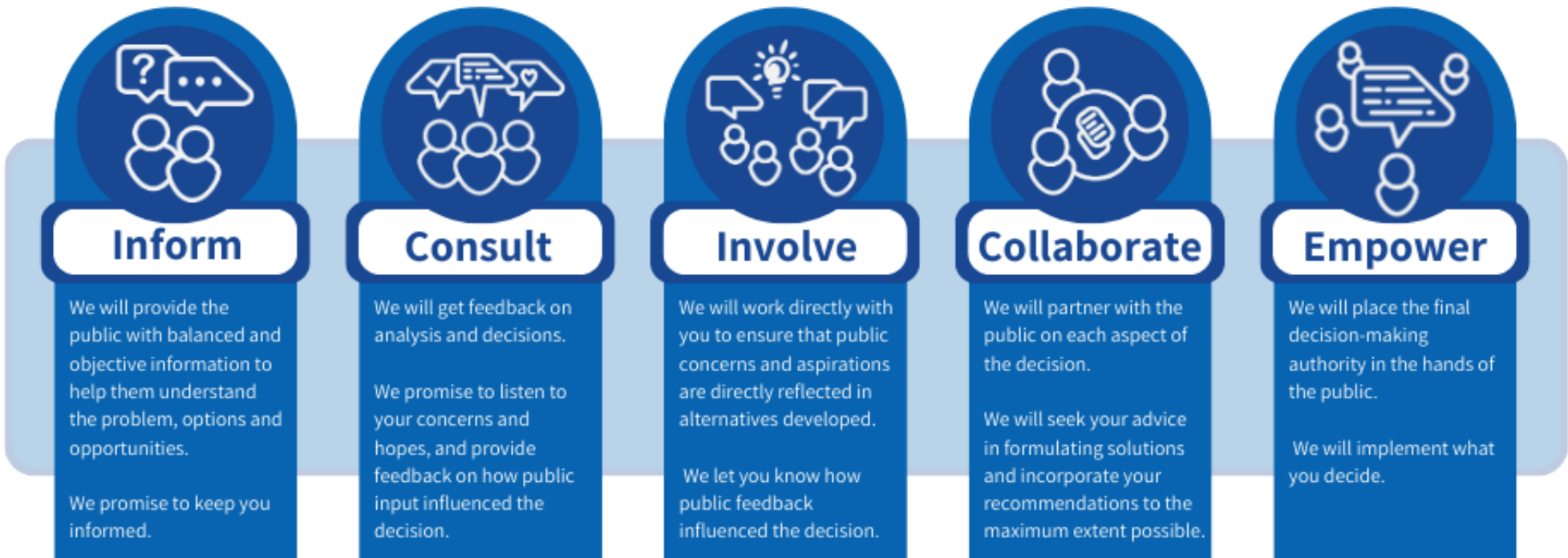
The Engagement Spectrum

Opportunities for engagement vary from project to project and from situation to situation. No single approach will work in every circumstance; each opportunity must be weighed on its merits to determine the correct public engagement approach. Engagement can be seen as a continuum, flowing from one type to another. However, because NL Health Services is committed to goal-driven and outcome-oriented engagement, using a spectrum that considers the increasing impact of public input on the decision-making process is helpful. It is also beneficial to consider public engagement as having different, increasing promises to the public:

- We will share information with you.
- We will seek feedback from you.
- We will draw on your ideas and suggestions.
- We will collaborate with you on solutions.
- We will empower you to make decisions.

The NL Health Services Public Engagement Spectrum has been adapted from materials created by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), an international organization dedicated to advancing public participation and engagement as foundational practices across all organizations and industries. The IAP2 spectrum, tools and techniques are adopted broadly by healthcare organizations in North America.

Typically, engagement involves a hybrid of activities and borrows elements from across the spectrum. The most appropriate approach depends on the issue and the goals.



Spectrum and commitment

“IAP2 believes that each level of public participation and the accompanying goal suggests a commitment is being made to the public. The project sponsor promises to take action that will achieve the goal of the level selected.”

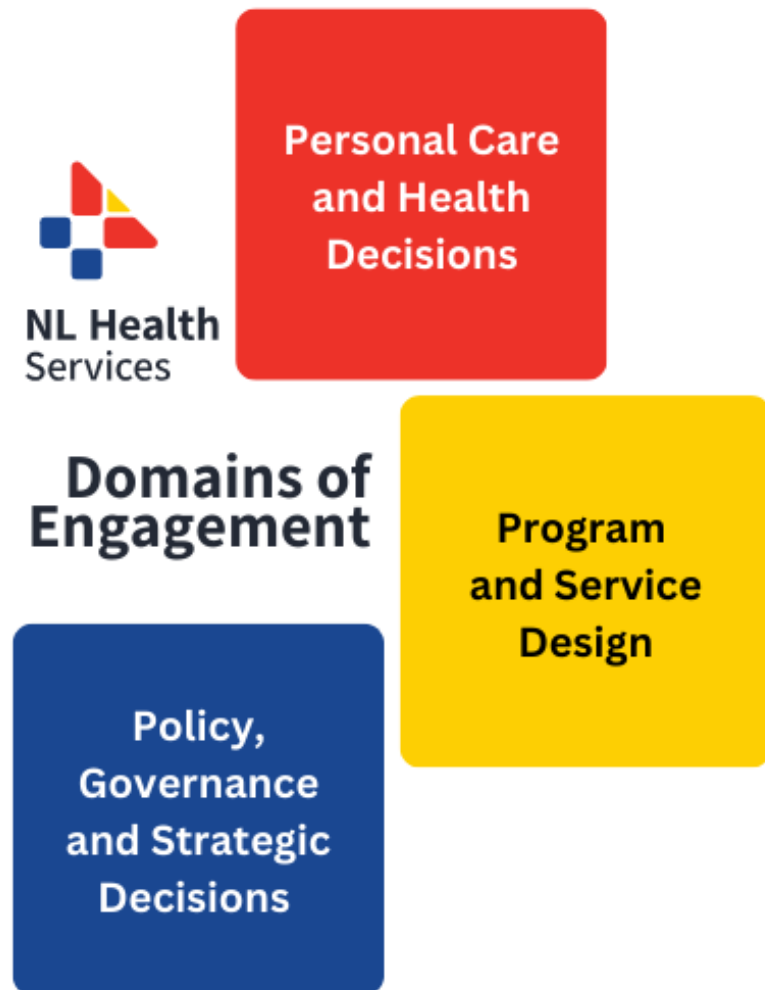
- *The International Association of Public Participation*

Domains

Engagement happens every day, in many ways, and at every level of the organization. NL Health Services has a responsibility to engage the public in decision-making, planning, design and governance for the delivery of services across three domains:

- We engage with clients and their families in the domain of personal care and health decisions.
- We engage with the public on decisions in the domain of program and service design.
- We engage with communities, individuals and other organizations and governments in the domain of policy, governance and strategic decisions.

These domains help to identify the lead for public engagement in each area.



Scope, Approvals and Reporting

All public engagement initiatives require a plan that outlines the purpose of the engagement, the critical decision or opportunity being explored through engagement, a breakdown of the publics to be engaged, the level of engagement selected, and the approach(es) to be taken. The Office of Public Engagement has developed tools and templates to assist with creating a public engagement plan. Individuals or groups leading a public engagement may use these or other quality improvement tools for planning. An approvals and reporting matrix outlines the process for a public engagement to be approved, initiated and reported.

1. Engagement of individual patients in decision-making around their care is the responsibility of the provider/team and the patient/ family. Guidelines for engaging patients in their care are outlined in the *People-centred Care Framework*, and other resources are prepared, monitored, and maintained by Quality Improvement and Risk Management. Typical tactics for individual engagement include one-on-one discussions, letters and other personal communications. The plan for a patient's care is documented in the personal health record.
2. The Public Health Department leads engagements to build community capacity, guided by the *Public Health Framework for Newfoundland and Labrador*. Plans are established, and progress is monitored through Public Health protocols. The Office of Public Engagement will provide support, as necessary and where possible.
3. Engaging system users, community partners, and other interest holders to provide public input to organizational decisions is the responsibility of the department, division, team, staff, leader, committee, council, or network seeking public feedback. Engagement plans must follow the organization's public engagement framework and be approved according to the Approvals and Reporting Matrix. Public Engagement and External Relations will help to facilitate formal public engagements, as required. "What We Heard" reports must be publicly available following formal engagements.
4. Public Engagement facilitates engagement activities for policy and governance decisions and support the Planning, Performance, and Evaluation Department on strategic planning engagements.

Approval and Reporting Matrix

ENGAGING ON ORGANIZATIONAL DECISIONS		POLICY, GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGIC DECISIONS	
Owner	Divisional/ Departmental Project Lead	Owner	Office of Public Engagement Planning, Performance and Evaluation
Approval Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approval to initiate a public engagement plan: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Manager ii. Senior Director 2. Inform Director, Office of Public Engagement (OPE), and complete request form if seeking support from OPE 3. Draft engagement plan: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Approved by Division Manager ii. Approved by Senior Director iii. Approved by VP/ COO 	Approval Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approval to initiate a public engagement plan: Executive Management Committee and Community Engagement Committee, Board of Trustees 2. Draft engagement plan <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Approved by Director, OPE ii. Approved by Chief, OPE iii. Approved by CEO iv. KIV/ FYI: Chair, Community Engagement Committee
Reporting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quarterly reporting, ongoing engagement plans: Chief, OPE 2. Annual reporting, ongoing engagements: Community Engagement Committee 3. What We Heard report: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Manager ii. Senior Director iii. VP/ COO iv. Public Reporting 	Reporting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What We Heard report: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Executive Management Committee ii. Community Engagement Committee iii. Public Reporting

Evaluation

The Public Engagement Framework will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary. The evaluation process will include a review of engagement policies, guidelines, tools and practices, utilizing *The Public and Patient Engagement Evaluation Tool (PPEET)* from the Public and Patient Engagement Collaborative at McMaster University.

References

- Accreditation Canada
- *Health Accord for Newfoundland & Labrador: A 10-year health transformation*, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (2024).
- International Association of Public Participation (Canada).
- *A Public Health Framework for Newfoundland and Labrador: Preventing Disease, Promoting Health and Protecting Current and Future Generations*, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 2023).
- *People-centred Care Framework*, Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (2024).
- *Public Engagement Guide*, Public Engagement and Planning Division, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- *Strategic Plan 2024-2026*, Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (2024).
- *The Public and Patient Engagement Evaluation Tool (PPEET)*, Public and Patient Engagement Collaborative, McMaster University (2018).

Contact Us

For more information on the Public Engagement Program at NL Health Services, please get in touch with the Office of Public Engagement and External Relations.