

CARS

Communities Achieving
Responsive Services

Fact Sheet # 10

Understanding Service Integration

Across Canada there is an increasing awareness that systems of support for communities need to be:

- Integrated
- Adapted to the local context
- Responsive to the changing needs of community members

In recent years integrated community development has emerged as a key public policy topic. Integrated approaches to social services are becoming viewed as an effective way to address challenges in providing cost effective and responsive services to families and individuals, especially in rural remote and northern areas.

Under the guise of effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness, the definition of integrated services has ranged from simple coordination and information sharing of local service providers, to government mandated collaborations between organizations, to seamless service delivery efforts. Seamless service delivery efforts are those that include:

- One stop access to services
- Collective management structures
- Shared governance models
- Multi dimensional supports

Clearly confusion exists in defining an integrated approach to service delivery.

The CARS process defines integrated services as more systemically different than traditional service delivery models, often requiring the development of new and innovated public policy supports. Governments continue to respond to service delivery needs through sector silos and individual program streams, each with their own specific mandates, funding requirements, reporting formats and target populations. The challenge for communities, however, is to take government directed policies, programs and resources, partner them with local community assets, and build a responsive community system of support. To do that community must:

- Base service development on community defined needs instead of politically driven government mandates
- Learn how to use government initiatives to respond to local community challenges
- Respond to community members as whole units by piecing together an array of initiatives, services, funding streams, changing political direction and community partners into one collective community effort

- Challenge the notion of targeted service delivery by building a community based approach to supporting high risk community members
- Realize that terms such as “responsiveness”, “accessibility” and “inclusiveness” are not defined by political legislation, policies or programs, but rather by a community’s willingness to recognize, value, listen and respond to each of its community members

This lack of resources in recent years has pushed organizations into the “doing more with less” arena, resulting in the redesigning of organizations in conflict and protecting of organizational turf. The result is that many organizations are very focused on their own issues, their own problems and their own solutions. With organizations struggling to look after their own there are fewer resources for community mobilization and system integration efforts even though we know the benefits of such a paradigm shift. A broader community centred approach rarely exists. This leaves governments in a position of “talking the talk” regarding integrated services but rarely “walking the walk” at a community level.

The Road from Fragmented Service to Integrated Services

