

Case Study Team Syntegrity

The Client:

Health Canada

The Problem/ The Challenge

The Canadian Strategy on HIV AIDS (CSHA) division within Health Canada was established in 1998. Its mandate is to deliver the federal government's response to HIV AIDS and develop a pan-Canadian response to the epidemic. In doing so, the CSHA set out to work more closely with, and gain the support and commitment of, key stakeholders across Canada.

A steering committee comprised of Health Canada and representatives from several stakeholder groups that include Canadians living with HIV AIDS, leaders of community-based organizations and others identified the need for a strategic plan. Health Canada would provide the framework and guidance for the development of the plan, but "ownership" of the plan would reside with key stakeholders outside the federal government. Working with a decentralized, autonomous, and advocacy-laden community of stakeholders proved difficult, and slowed progress. Arriving at a mutual understanding among all parties, determining priorities for funding, and articulating action plans with reciprocal accountability proved inaccessible.

The Syntegration

In December 2002, Health Canada, on behalf of the CSHA steering committee, invited more than 30 key stakeholders to participate in a Syntegration in order to accelerate the development and enhance the content of the CSHA strategic plan. The opening question posed to the participants was:

"What must we do to optimize the Canadian response to HIV AIDS within the next 5 years?"

Participants included people living with HIV AIDS, policy makers, community-based organization leaders, doctors, nurses, vaccine researchers, and members of the steering committee. The participants convened for 3.5 days and worked from an agenda that they themselves had formulated at the beginning of the Syntegration. The agenda identified what the participants deemed to be the most important topics of discussion in relation to the opening question. Agenda items included: Communications and Awareness, Social Justice, Strategies for Unique Populations, Community-based Agencies, Drug Policy & Harm Reduction, Research, Dynamic Prevention, Global Response, Positive Action, Strategic Approach to Funding, Care & Treatment, and Governance Model.

Results

- The Syntegration provided Health Canada and the steering committee the informed content that was critical to a relevant and achievable strategic plan. The plan denoted goals, objectives, recommendations, and actions with a high degree of specificity, and was integrative of the multiple perspectives and expertise of the participants.
- The Syntegration provided a format and forum for participants to explore the issues with far less advocacy than is typical.
- The Syntegration enhanced Health Canada's relationship with key stakeholders.
- The steering committee obtained the stakeholders' "permission" to continue with crafting the strategic plan without their direct involvement. This was a direct result of having arrived at a shared understanding among all participants, and of having won the trust of the larger group so that the smaller committee could proceed without delay.

Statements of Participants

- "It has been intensive work, and extremely valuable work. There have been major steps made forward."
- "We were able to inform each other about pitfalls of the past as we advance to the future – in a guiding and respectful way. This is a change from the head-butting process we are used to."
- "Pleasure connecting with each of you. Very satisfied with our work. Excited that we set up mechanisms, timelines – that's a first – accountability mechanisms – that's also a first."
- "The last few days have been a consolidating experience."
- "A unique experience. A lot of firsts. This is as strong of empowerment as it gets."