

Introduction:

There are several long-standing system-level gaps that prevent people from finding services that meet their mental health and substance use needs. For those with complex needs, the challenges are even greater. A diversity of perspectives is needed to innovatively address these gaps and better meet people's needs.

The costs of inadequate planning and inconsistent access to services that meet needs are high – both personal and financial (1). This issue is compounded for people with complex needs – in particular those with serious mental health and/or substance use needs (including concurrent disorders), coupled with one or more of the following: acquired brain injury, developmental or intellectual disabilities, history of violence and/or incarceration. In British Columbia (BC), Canada, better supporting people with complex needs who reside in enhanced health housing settings has been prioritized (2,3). This initiative is supported by BC's Complex Care Housing (CCH) framework and funding program. The Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use ECHO, supported through BC's Complex Care Housing (CCH) framework and funding program, uses a novel approach to build workforce capacity to better support people with complex mental health, substance use and other needs, including in housing contexts.

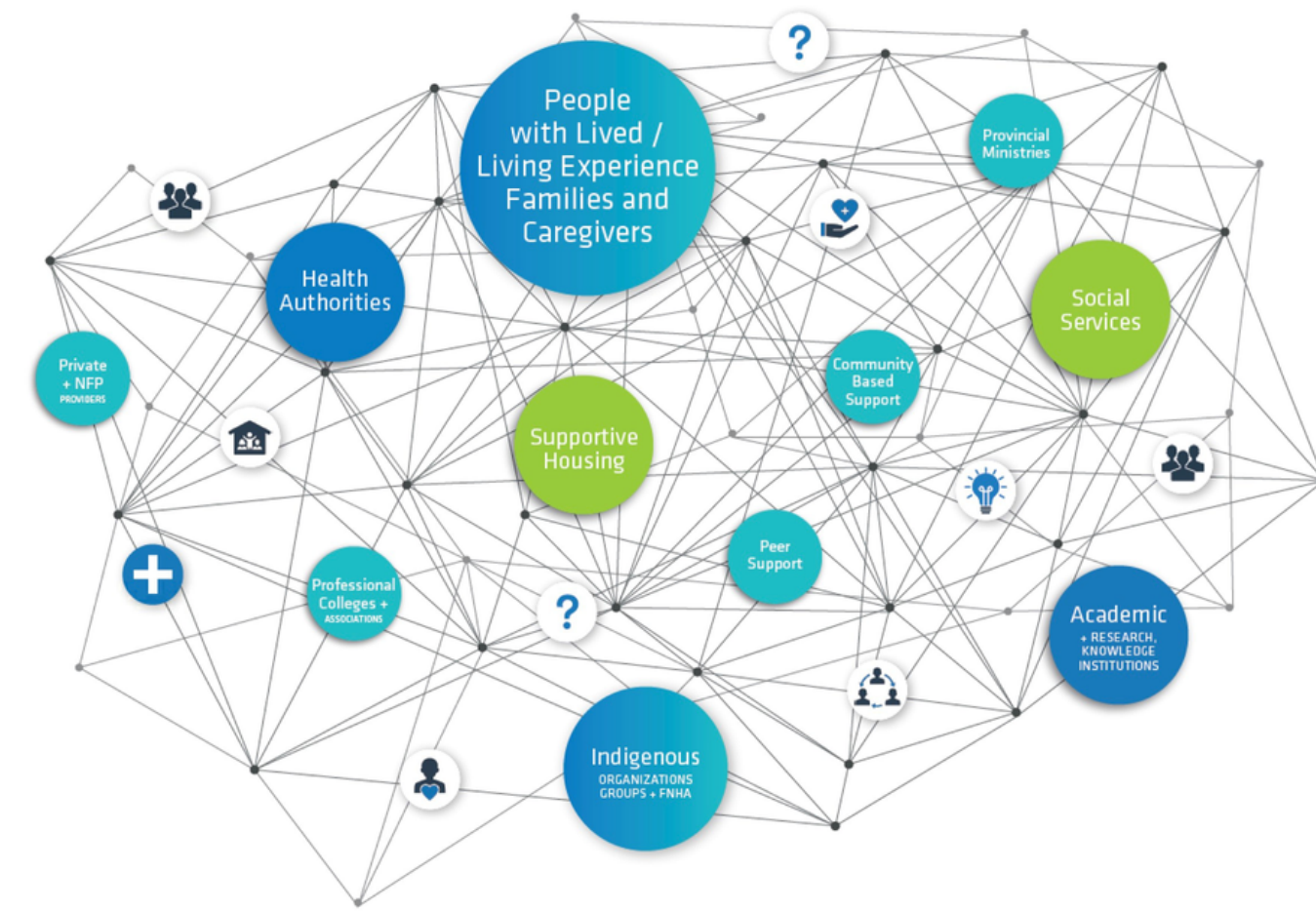
Guiding Principles:

1. Engaging diverse perspectives along the continuum of care leads to more expeditious and creative problem-solving due to accelerated knowledge translation and exchange (4).
2. Incorporating the preferences and perspectives of patients, families and/or other end users leads to better outcomes (5).

Program Description:

The Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use Network (the Network)

The Network, which supports this ECHO project, was created as a mechanism to better understand and advance solutions to address the system-level gaps experienced by people with complex mental health, substance use, and other needs in BC, Canada. The Network uses innovative, evidence-informed approaches to creatively problematize some of societies' most complex challenges, which is then reflected in the topics covered in our ECHO sessions. Knowledge translation and exchange (KTE) have properties of a contagion and are fundamentally embedded in relationships and propagated by the connections within the Network. The Network is dynamic and thoughtfully organized to accelerate the creation of knowledge toward innovative approaches.



Identifying ECHO Themes and Topics

The Network is leading an extensive and ongoing needs assessment along the continuum of care in BC, inviting input from a range of sources, including from PWLLE, to better understand unmet needs and to identify opportunities for improvement. The subsequent perspectives and priorities highlighted below demonstrate how variable they can be; if only one group had been engaged, (e.g. leadership), ECHO might not meet the needs of front line staff nor the preferences of clients.



As part of the needs assessment, there were 36 group engagements with PWLLE; 8 focus groups and an online survey with CCH staff; and, 23 consultations with CCH leaders. Many of these perspectives and priorities have been summarized in various reports (6, 7).

Priorities identified by PWLLE in the LEAP report:

- Be bold and make changes
- Provider qualities
- Access
- Quality and safety
- Continuity of care
- Stigma
- Social determinants of health
- Family involvement in care

Learning Theme Needs Identified By CCH Staff:

- Boundary-setting
- CCH program resources
- Concurrent disorders
- Crisis intervention
- Cultural awareness
- Gender equity and 2SLGBTQ+
- Medical concerns
- Overdose management
- Staff self-care
- Stigma

Issues Identified By CCH Leadership:

- Lack of experience working with clients with complex needs
- High turnover and many new, inexperienced staff
- Need to balance "wise practices" with professional training/experience for staff without formal credentials
- Different operational policies and procedures between health authorities and service providers
- Lack of technology/equipment to participant in virtual training
- Scheduling constraints and lack of staff coverage/backfill

Hub Team

The Provincial MHSU ECHO Hub Team is comprised of individuals with varied expertise along the MHSU continuum of care, in both discipline and setting. The team includes a variety of service providers and is committed to meaningfully engaging PWLLE and therefore also includes a lived experience strategic advisor, a peer support worker and several others with varying degrees of lived and living experience.

ECHO Sessions

The Hub Team members, in collaboration with the Network and ECHO project team, distilled the themes captured by the needs assessment into potential didactic topics. They also inform competency level, suggest subject matter experts from their respective networks, deliver didactic and case presentations, and participate in the sessions. Some were presented by, or in partnership with, PWLLE. Given the implicit diversity of expertise and experience among this unique ECHO, didactic content is broadly accessible and includes practical takeaways that participants can readily implement. Case presentations are similarly diverse and include scenarios experienced by providers in a range of contexts, from CCH to treatment for complex concurrent disorders.

Selected ECHO session topics:

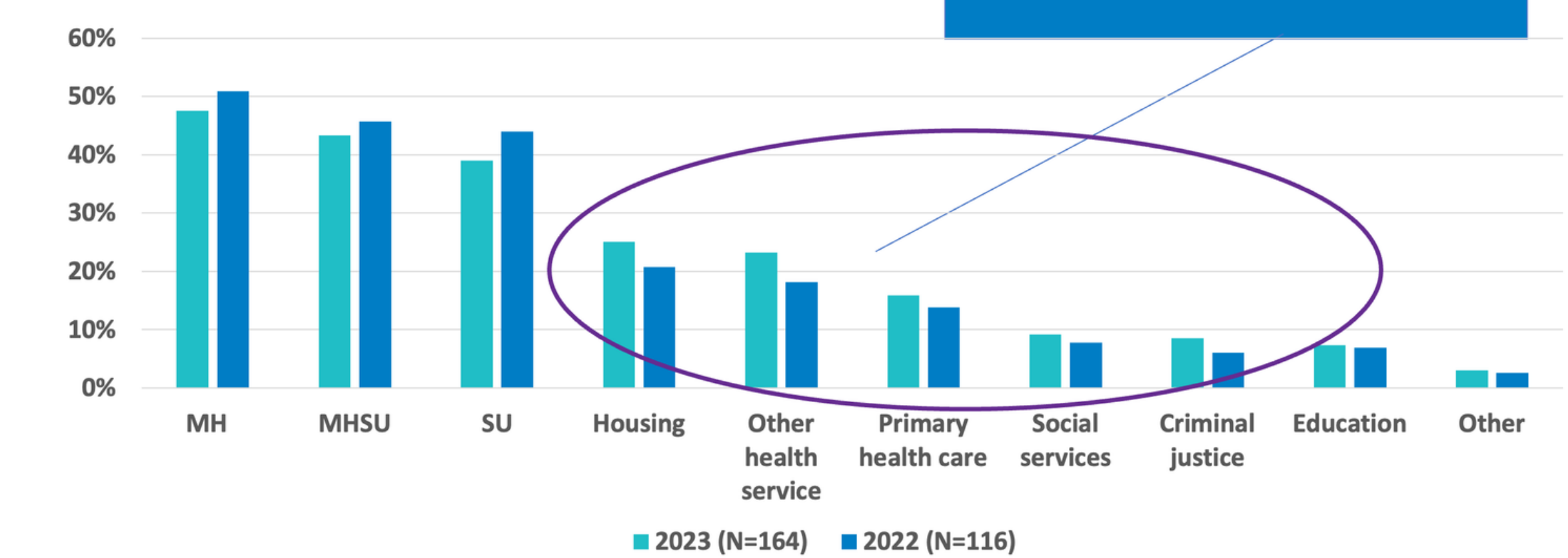
- Trauma-informed practice
- Crisis prevention and intervention: Comfort planning
- Supporting clients with challenging behaviours
- The impacts of stigma on individuals and strategies to improve care
- Understanding the 'other' symptoms of psychosis: How do cognitive and negative symptoms impact everyday functioning?
- Stepping up for the check-in: Creating a psychologically healthy & safe workplace
- Indigenous principles of recovery and healing: the power of connection
- Understanding suicide to prevent suicide

Participants

Demographic analysis indicated favorable shifts in participation from the 2022 to the 2023 series.

- Registration increased overall by 50% in 2023 over the previous year (2022, n= 119 and 2023, n= 179).
- There was an increase in participation by service providers representing our target audiences including nurses, social workers, psychologists, housing providers and those working criminal justice.
- There was proportionately more representation from the housing, health and social service sectors.
- This evolution of participants' demographic composition is important because the needs assessment clearly indicated that to enhance workforce capacity, front line staff from CCH contexts would need to participate.

Sector



Discussion:

The Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use ECHO is designed to address long-standing system-level gaps. Its innovative approach is responsive to the unmet needs of both people with complex MHSU needs as well as service providers.

Through the needs assessment, our ECHO initiative continues to adapt and evolve to further strengthen workforce capacity in a sector that is rapidly scaling up to address system-level gaps (i.e., complex care housing). We have learned that:

- Many professional development programs aimed at workforce capacity development are intended to complement professional and clinical practice and therefore do not address the current gaps at a competency level appropriate to the identified needs of the CCH workforce.
- In this context, almost half the workforce has less than 2 years experience and greater than half are support workers, many of whom have lived experience themselves. The vast majority are not professionalized or clinical staff (7); therefore, it is necessary to ensure appropriate competency level of session content.
- There are critical barriers to virtual learning in housing contexts due to lack of computer equipment and Wi-Fi, as well as diverse schedules, shift changes and collective agreements across providers. For example, two team members had to travel to housing locations with equipment to "hotspot" the session for staff.
- Most CCH staff are not privy to medical histories and are only able to support and respond to behaviour they observe. Therefore, the needs assessment findings overwhelmingly suggested that the sessions should provide practical takeaways and less theory and/or diagnostic interpretation.

In conclusion, the Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use ECHO has intentionally prioritized the engagement of PWLLE as well as service providers in all aspects of planning and delivering ECHO sessions. This approach has demonstrated the value of engaging with the end users meaningfully and early in the process to better understand unmet needs, ultimately leading to system changes and better outcomes.

References:

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