

The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care's Patient & Family Advisory Council (PFAC)

Transforming Public Administration & Increasing Public Participation by Engaging Patients, Families & Caregivers

RELEVANCE

Background

Patient engagement first gained traction more than a decade ago and has since come to influence care delivery, health policy development, and interactions between patients and their health care providers across Ontario. Increased interest in patient engagement was driven by the changing health care needs of those living with chronic illnesses, a call for enhanced transparency and accountability in health care delivery, and new opportunities for improvement identified by health care consumers.

Evidence has consistently demonstrated that patient engagement is beneficial to patients and effective at improving quality of care. Patients who are consistently engaged are more likely to trust their clinicians, more likely to adhere to treatment recommendations, and less likely to die following a major health event. There is also clear evidence that people want to play an active part in their care and widespread belief in the medical community that more engaged patients will lead to higher quality, more efficient health care.

Context

Expanding and improving patient engagement in Ontario is a key element of three provincial strategies to transform the health care system. Specifically:

1. The *Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care* articulates a commitment to protecting our universal health care system by expanding patient engagement.
2. The *Patients First Act, 2016*, increasing opportunities for patient engagement by making the Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) responsible for establishing one or more patient and family advisory committees within their respective regions.
3. Open Health, the Ministry's strategy for implementing Ontario's commitments to create "a more open and transparent government for the people of Ontario", includes measures to expand and improve patient engagement in Ontario.

In order to support the achievement of the goals of these various strategies and promote a more open, transparent, and accountable health system, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has formed a Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC) for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

INNOVATION

Action

The Minister's PFAC, unlike patient and family advisory groups based in hospitals and other health care delivery organizations, will focus on strategic health priorities that have the potential to directly impact the lives of patients across the province. The PFAC will provide advice on complex and varied policy priorities, including large-scale, transformative health system reforms involving multiple sectors.

The leadership the Chair will provide, both within the ministry and across the health system, will help to ensure that the perspectives of patients, caregivers and families influence provincial policy decisions.

Besides facilitating PFAC meetings, the Chair will provide centralized thought leadership on patient engagement, support ministry efforts to embed patient engagement in the policy process, and work to expand and improve patient engagement in Ontario



In order to ensure the Minister's PFAC is composed of an appropriate mix of voices and perspectives, and is well-positioned to provide advice on large-scale health system reforms, an open and innovative recruitment process was launched in February 2017. The recruitment process was developed based on the recommendations of leading industry experts and guaranteed an unbiased selection of members, who will provide diverse perspectives on policy issues.



Multiple communications channels were leveraged during recruitment, including social media, a provincial news release, and advertising in national outlets, such as the *Globe and Mail* and *La Presse*.

The ministry also engaged 235 patients and families across the province through in-person consultations and consulted 14 patient engagement thought leaders to get their perspectives on how the PFAC and PFAC Chair could drive change in Ontario and the key characteristics and competencies the Chair should have in order to succeed.

The ministry strove to ensure the recruitment process was inclusive, with specific outreach being conducted amongst the Francophone and Indigenous communities of Ontario.

EFFECTIVENESS

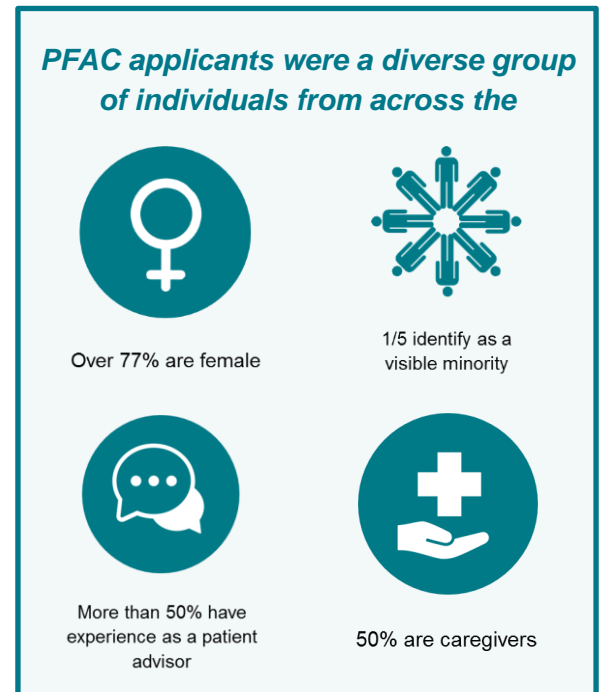
Response

In total, over 100 individuals applied for the position of PFAC Chair and more than 1,200 Ontarians applied to be a PFAC member.

The ministry worked with engagement experts to ensure the recruitment process was inclusive, objective, and guided by best practice.

Of the 1,200 applicants, sixty candidates were interviewed, based on whether they were: available, committed, capable, public-spirited, non-partisan, and open to learning.

By soliciting the participation of patients and caregivers with differing opinions and experiences, and recruiting members from across the province, the ministry will increase public participation in health system decision-making and transform the administration of the health system through the regular and systematic engagement of health system users.



Transformation

In order to ensure the Minister’s PFAC has the supports necessary to effectively inform health policy, and to support the expansion of patient engagement in Ontario, the Ministry is taking the following key steps to build patient engagement infrastructure across the province:

- 1 The PFAC Chair will be embedded within the Ministry’s senior leadership team and will provide expert advice directly to the Minister that will facilitate the expansion of patient engagement activities in Ontario.
- 2 In order to promote the sharing of best practices and facilitate the expansion of patient engagement across all health settings, the PFAC will collaborate with a broader ‘network’ of patient and family advisors.
- 3 The Ministry is forming a PFAC Secretariat, to support the PFAC and facilitate more streamlined patient engagement across government.

Building Patient Engagement Infrastructure in Ontario



Significance

Result

Establishing a Patient and Family Advisory Council for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and engaging the Council on policy priorities that have an impact on patient care and experiences establishes Ontario as an innovator in the field of patient engagement and facilitates open dialogue with Ontarians.

Since 2015, the Ministry has made significant progress toward embedding patient engagement in government processes, and expanding patient engagement in Ontario. Within the past two years, Ontario has moved from a system that had no patient engagement infrastructure, to a system that requires patient and community engagement via legislation, and engages patients on a more systematic level than any comparable jurisdiction.

The innovative process that was adopted to recruit Council members, and the use of innovative engagement platforms to involve ever increasing numbers of Ontarians in policy development, demonstrates the ministry's commitment to putting patients and families at the centre of the health care system. By increasing public participation in government, and thereby improving transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, the ministry will transform public administration and ensure that patients, families, and caregivers have a voice in the ongoing evolution of health care in Ontario.