

From: From Milton Sussman, CEO
Sent: Thursday, February 11, 2016 4:57 PM
Subject: Maximizing capacity and building healthy community, together



It started with an observation: the dietitians at Access NorWest were noticing that 90 per cent of people coming in to see them were struggling with diabetes and wanted to provide better service for their community.

They introduced a cooking class and were surprised to discover that people were struggling with hunger and were coming in to eat, not cook.

Working with [Community Food Centres Canada](#) was a way to meet this community need, and expand the scope of [Access NorWest](#) to include the NorWest Community Food Centre. This partnership created the first health centre in Canada to address food security in such a robust fashion, right here in our Region.

It also created new ways to engage the community in their health and wellness. People who Access NorWest might not have been in contact with were showing up for the lunch program...that's why public health, social work and family services were invited to participate. A community health agency, family services, a national organization and the Region partnered to wrap health services around people with the highest needs in this community.

Public health, for example, suddenly had the chance to use a new venue that would allow them to see between 15 and 20 moms a week at their Healthy Baby Program. Moms with high needs and diverse backgrounds come for lunch and stay for a well-baby program.

Partnerships like this allow health care to meet the needs of the community it serves, in a way that the community needs. By proactively having a range of services available in a comfortable, less clinical setting, health providers are able to build relationships – and trust.

The residents of this community have not only built trusting relationships with health providers, they've also made friends. Newcomers, people with no friends are now building a support network of their own, an element which further contributes to their health and wellness.

When 71 people were interviewed by Community Food Partners Canada to assess the effectiveness of the program, 97 per cent of them said they feel like they belong to a community at NorWest. And 75 per cent of people noted an improvement in their mental health since they started coming to the centre.

Perhaps most exciting is engaging the individuals and families in this community to take charge of their own health by building their capacity. None of this is possible without partnership.

I saw this first-hand when I toured the Access NorWest and the NorWest Community Food Centre. The lunch program is but one example of how this group is embracing innovation and partnership to truly serve the health needs of their community. In working together with other organizations, facilities and even with the acute care services in that area, the community's health needs are being met in unique and creative ways.

Access Norwest already involves a partnership between the Region ([public health](#), [mental health](#), [shared care](#)), the Department of Family Services ([Employment & Income Assistance](#), [Children's Disability Services](#)), [NorWest](#) (primary care, community development, counseling and a childcare centre), [My Health Team](#) and the [Manitoba Parent-Child Coalitions](#).

The lunch program not only involves a national organization (committed to building food centres across Canada), it also includes the Region (public health, [dietitians](#)), Province ([Healthy Baby Program](#)), NorWest (primary care, community development), [Four Feathers](#), the [Keewatin Inkster Neighbourhood Network](#) and [Willow Centre](#).

I am struck by how willingness to partner in new ways maximizes capacity and allows the partnership to have a greater impact than anyone could do on their own. It is so interesting to see greater understanding unfold because of joint responsibility, and how a willingness to try new approaches has created the potential for such possibility.

We are all serving the same people and need to work better at providing service, together. No one element of our health system can provide services in isolation.

The willingness to collaborate and communicate must become how we approach our work. Collaborating once, or having one meeting isn't how innovative partnerships are built. As Access NorWest has demonstrated, being constant collaboration and contact with other groups allows us to continue looking at ways to collectively improve services, and provide solutions to unmet needs. I want to commend Access NorWest for inspiring me, and showing me what is possible with innovative partnerships. The culture of engagement at Access NorWest – where staff can come forward with an idea, where they feel they have a right to have a voice because innovation is valued and credited – is the culture I would like to build in the Region.

If you know how innovation, partnership and creativity could help further the health of our community, I hope you'll share your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Milton Sussman

President and CEO Winnipeg Regional Health Authority