



**WHAT DOES
WELLNESS
MEAN TO
YOU?**

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Community Hub

A Report on Wellness

October • 2019



STRATHCONA
COUNTY



Building on the learning

Strathcona County commissioned a Community Hub Study in 2018 to examine the potential for the creation of a community hub for Strathcona County.

The project researched community hubs across Canada to gain insights as to how Strathcona County could approach the design and implementation of a community hub¹. The study also engaged partners and stakeholders to help define the vision and purpose for a potential Strathcona County community hub space. Key elements that emerged in the Community Hub Study included:

- A community hub would be a welcoming gathering place for everyone in the community, promoting a culture of acceptance and celebrating diversity. It would combine three elements: welcoming dynamic and accessible space; core, complementary and community building services; and synergy that comes when organizations and individuals come together for the collective good².
- A community hub would have a universal age-friendly focus to serve citizens across all life stages (not specific to a specialized population or group).
- Community partners would work together in new ways in a community hub setting: proactively sharing information on services or community trends, thinking and planning together, and collaborating and/or integrating services.
- A community hub would seek to integrate Strathcona County assets, community connections and resources for improved social outcomes. This integration would provide citizens with new opportunities to create value in their own lives and the lives of others³.

1. Strathcona County Community Hub Study, Strathcona County, pg. 11

2. Ibid., pg. 18-19

3. Ibid., pg. 2

The 2018 Community Hub Study recommended that the County engage citizens to obtain their ideas and perspectives on the concept of a community hub. In 2019, Strathcona County acted on this recommendation and continued the community hub conversation in three ways:



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Connecting with residents of Strathcona County on the theme of wellness as a focus for a universal community hub.



RESEARCH INTO BEST PRACTICES:

Conversations with existing community hubs to glean practical insights on the evolution, purpose and contributions of relevant community hubs.



PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Exploring the connection of this work with Recreation, Parks and Culture's Recreation and Culture Strategy and implementation.

The following sections summarize learnings in 2019, and implications for Strathcona County and community organizations that have a collective interest in individual, family and community wellness.

Summary learning: existing community hubs

Strathcona County Family and Community Services (FCS) staff connected with leaders of seventeen community hubs in Alberta and throughout Canada. They identified the critical learnings summarized below.

Colocation is the start: synergy is the goal

Colocation was identified as a critical action that expedited relationship building between partners and resulted in improved access for citizens:

- Citizens have convenient, one-stop access to multiple supports. A centralized, multi-purpose location underscores welcome, inclusion and belonging for all. With many reasons to walk through the doors, a community hub can also reduce citizen fears of stigma for accessing a specialized service. Those that have safety concerns can also seek services without drawing attention to their destination (e.g., someone experiencing family violence).
- Colocated services can provide complementary supports. Partnering staff bring specialized expertise; they understand the diverse needs of citizens and can coordinate “warm handoffs” for other services. As most people do not seek services until they are ready, these seamless connections can help people get beyond symptoms to “root causes” of issues. Colocation also creates visibility for services - more citizens become aware of the range of supports available.

- Colocation can lead to coordinated efforts. Leaders of existing community hubs emphasized that the colocation of services is just a first step. The real value is realized when colocated partners begin to think, plan, and work together in more collaborative, coordinated, and integrated ways. Communities can undertake more holistic strategies, purposefully targeting more complex issues and positively impacting outcomes (e.g., wellness; livability; inclusion, etc.). Colocation and partnered efforts can result in greater efficiencies. Community hub leaders identified that resources could also be leveraged for even greater results when partners in public, non-profit and private sectors work together in support of shared goals.
- When community partners take the time to build relationships before colocation, they can “hit the ground running” for immediate and greater results when colocation occurs. Efforts to collaborate should not wait for colocation. It takes time, planning and lived experience to learn to work together and build trusting relationships. This often represents growth along a continuum: partners deepen their work together from coordination and collaboration to multi-disciplinary problem solving, to even integration (e.g., one intake). This expanded way of working maximizes benefits for citizens, partners and the community.

Gathering spaces invite community building

Gathering spaces in community hubs can invite citizen engagement and community development. Community hubs provide flexible spaces where citizens can meet and connect with their friends and neighbours. Citizens soon learn that hubs can be helpful places to find out about resources and supports that are available in the community. Community hub partners can choose to play a community-building role by purposefully convening diverse groups of people with shared interests or goals. Affordable events in these gathering places can also foster accessibility and relationship building. Through access to a variety of opportunities to connect in formal and informal ways, citizens can broaden their personal networks. The result can be healthy for citizens and community - citizens feel more connected to the community, which can lead them to participate and connect even more.



Wellness & community feedback

2019 public engagement

In spring 2019, Strathcona County's FCS surveyed over 1,400 residents to learn their thoughts on the idea of a community wellness hub.

The survey sought to understand (1) how citizens define wellness, (2) what types of services and supports citizens believe should be in a community wellness hub and (3) how citizens think social service providers and other community organizations in Strathcona County could work together in one location to better support community wellness.

Strathcona County's definition of wellness

Wellness is a holistic concept – there are many dimensions to wellness reflect the diverse priorities and interests of Strathcona County residents, including⁴:



Social:

- relationships with family, friends, other community members



Physical:

- taking care of your body



Emotional:

- having positive feelings about self; sharing feelings



Occupational/vocational:

- satisfaction with work and volunteer activities; work/life balance



Intellectual:

- learning new skills; participating in creative activities



Environmental:

- experiencing a clean, safe and healthy environment



Spiritual:

- living a meaningful and purposeful life

Citizens were presented with the above-mentioned elements of holistic wellness and were asked which of the seven elements represented wellness to them. Just under half (45%) of survey respondents identified all seven elements as being a part of their definition of wellness, and the majority (80%) of respondents identified four or more elements. Survey results depict that the majority of Strathcona County residents think of wellness as a multi-faceted concept.

Survey respondents were also asked which elements of wellness Strathcona County should support in a community wellness facility. Survey respondents prioritized the seven elements of wellness as follows: social (85%), physical (80%), emotional (73%), environmental (71%), intellectual (68%), occupational (55%) and spiritual (48%). Survey responses highlight the importance of designing facilities that both support the individual facets of wellness and prioritize opportunities for informal and formal connection.

4. Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness, Government of Alberta, pg. 6

Ways of working together

When asked how social service providers and community organizations could work together in one location to better support wellness, several key themes emerged.

The top six priorities from respondents were

- **the colocation of complementary services;**
- **the provision of promotional events and courses where people can learn more about the elements of wellness, build relationships with people that share interests around holistic wellness and feel connected to community;**
- **increased information and advertising on existing programs and services;**
- **more collaboration, coordination, and partnership between organizations;**
- **address service delivery gaps; and**
- **increased accessibility (i.e., affordability, transportation, childcare, etc.).**

These key themes support the value that a hub can bring to a community and the accompanying collaboration, integration and efficiency that can result from service colocation and integration.

Future direction

Building on the feedback from the community and on learnings from existing leaders in hub development and operation, the future of community hubs in Strathcona County is continuing to evolve.

However, beyond the space and organization, it is the people and partners participating in the hub that creates an inviting, supportive and impactful atmosphere. They work together in support of a shared vision, encouraging each other to innovate and achieve greater community outcomes. “Hubbing” is this purposeful way of working together to create synergy where the sum is much greater than the parts.

Beyond a single structure, community hub development is also about supporting opportunities for hubs throughout the community. “Hubbing” occurs between community organizations, where government is just one kind of partner. Schools, libraries, Primary Care Networks, non-profit collaborations and even business collectives can serve as hubs promoting elements of holistic wellness. There may be opportunities in the future to leverage or scale-up existing or emerging hubs for improved citizen and community outcomes.



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