



Understanding What Works: Characteristics of Successful Multisector Partnerships in Canadian Physical Activity and Health Promotion

Ashley Johnson

Contact Author: a.johnson@queensu.ca

School of Kinesiology and Health Studies, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, K7L 3N6, Canada

Abstract

Background: Multisector partnerships have emerged as a cornerstone strategy for addressing complex public health challenges (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Woulfe et al., 2010; Zakocs & Edwards, 2006). In community health promotion, collaborations among health, social service, and educational sectors strengthen the design, delivery, and sustainability of interventions (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Existing reviews have identified numerous factors that influence partnership functioning, including leadership, action planning, shared vision, communication, and broader contextual conditions (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Wildridge et al., 2004; Wolff, 2001). They also highlight persistent challenges in defining and measuring “effectiveness,” noting an overemphasis on process indicators and inconsistent outcome measures (Dowling et al. 2004; Zakocs & Edwards, 2006). More recent work has examined theoretical frameworks for cross-sector collaboration (Bryson et al., 2015), sustainability in healthcare partnerships (Herald et al., 2015), and key elements supporting effective collaboration across international contexts (Alderwick et al., 2021; Corbin et al., 2018; Seaton et al., 2018). Despite this extensive scholarship, most reviews draw primarily from the United States and United Kingdom, rely heavily on peer-reviewed sources, and examine partnership stages in isolation. These limitations highlight the need for a Canadian-focused scoping review that integrates academic and grey literature to examine how multisector partnerships for health promotion form, function, and evolve across the full partnership lifecycle.

Methodology: Guided by Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework, this review examined peer-reviewed and grey literature published between July 1996, selected to coincide with the release of the action statement for the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (Canadian Public Health Association, 1996), and May 2025. Searches were conducted in MEDLINE, Web of Science, SPORTDiscus, and CINAHL and were supplemented by targeted grey literature retrieval through professional networks, relevant organizations, conferences, and a structured DuckDuckGo search limited to the first four pages of results (Bruner et al., 2015; Shirazipour et al., 2015).

Results & Conclusion: The review offers a descriptive overview and thematic synthesis of Canadian multisector partnerships for health promotion, mapping publication trends, partnership terminology, lifecycle stages, success factors, challenges, theoretical frameworks, and priority gaps across formation, maintenance, and institutionalization.

Keywords: multisector; partnerships; health promotion; scoping review



References

- Alderwick, H., Hutchings, A., Briggs, A. *et al.* The impacts of collaboration between local health care and non-health care organizations and factors shaping how they work: a systematic review of reviews. *BMC Public Health* 21, 753 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10630-1>
- Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1), 19-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616>
- Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (2002). Campus–community partnerships: The terms of engagement. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58(3), 503-516. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4560.00273>
- Bruner, M. W., Hillier, S., Baillie, C. P., Lavallee, L. F., Bruner, B. G., Hare, K., ... & Lévesque, L. (2016). Positive youth development in Aboriginal physical activity and sport: A systematic review. *Adolescent Research Review*, 1, 257-269. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-015-0021-9>
- Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Stone, M. M. (2015). Designing and implementing cross-sector collaborations: Needed and challenging. *Public Administration Review*, 75(5), 647–663. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24757438>
- Corbin, J. H. (2017). Health promotion, partnership and intersectoral action. *Health Promotion International*, 32(6), 923-929. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48518999>
- Dowling, B., Powell, M., & Glendinning, C. (2004). Conceptualising successful partnerships. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 12(4), 309-317. DOI: [10.1111/j.1365-2524.2004.00500.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2524.2004.00500.x)
- Roussos, S.T., & Fawcett, S.B. (2000). A review of collaborative partnerships as a strategy for improving community health. *Annual Reviews Public Health*, 21, 369-402. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.21.1.369>
- Seaton, C. L., Holm, N., Bottorff, J. L., Jones-Bricker, M., Errey, S., Caperchione, C. M., ... & Healy, T. (2018). Factors that impact the success of interorganizational health promotion collaborations: a scoping review. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 32(4), 1095-1109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890117117710875>
- Shirazipour, C. H., Baillie, C. P., Galaviz, K., Jarvis, J. W., & Latimer-Cheung, A. E. (2015). Evaluating the theoretical content of online physical activity information for people with multiple sclerosis. *International Journal of MS Care*, 17(2), 91-100. <https://doi.org/10.7224/1537-2073.2013-048>
- Wildridge, V., Childs, S., Cawthra, L., & Madge, B. (2004). How to create successful partnerships - a review of the literature. *Health Information & Libraries Journal*, 21, 3-19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-3324.2004.00497.x>
- Wolff, T. (2001). A practitioner's guide to successful coalitions. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 29(2), 173-191. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010366310857>
- Woulfe, J., Oliver, T.R., Zahner, S.J., & Siemering, K.Q. (2010). Multisector partnerships in population health improvement. *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 7(6), 1-7. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2995601/>
- Zakocs, R. C., & Edwards, E. M. (2006). What explains community coalition effectiveness? A review of the literature. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 30(4), 351-361. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2005.12.004>