

Stakeholder Dialogues program



Among its initial flagship and now most long-standing program, the Forum convenes **stakeholder dialogues** to provide an opportunity for 18-22 doers and thinkers, drawn from those who will be involved in or affected by decisions about the issue at hand, to deliberate a problem and its causes, options for addressing it, key implementation considerations, and next steps for different constituencies. Building around a deliberative dialogue approach, this innovative program helps to uncover unique understandings of these issues and spark action among policymakers and stakeholders. While we convene stakeholder dialogues across Canada and internationally, those held locally take place in our DialogueSpace, which was purpose-built to support this type of collective problem-solving.

Our approach to convening stakeholder dialogues consists of five steps and each is briefly described in turn below.

Consulting with key stakeholders

We conduct three types of preparatory consultations for each stakeholder dialogue. First, we work with a steering committee created specifically for each dialogue. Working collaboratively with the Forum team, the steering committee helps to: 1) refine the terms of reference for the evidence brief to clarify the problem and its causes, options for addressing it, and key implementation considerations; 2) identify key informants who can provide feedback on the terms of reference for the evidence brief and identify potential sources of reports and other information sources; 3) identify merit reviewers who can provide feedback on the draft evidence brief; 4) identify participants for the dialogue based on specific criteria (ability to bring to the dialogue unique views and experiences to bear on a challenge, learn from the research evidence and from others' views and experiences, and champion actions that will address the challenge creatively within their constituencies); and 5) review the thematic summary of the stakeholder dialogue deliberations.

Second, we conduct 15-20 interviews with key informants (e.g., representatives of citizen/patient groups, policymakers, stakeholders and researchers who are involved in or affected by the issue) to get feedback on the terms of reference for the evidence brief.

Third, we seek merit reviews of the draft evidence brief by at least one policymaker, one stakeholder, and one researcher.

Preparing an evidence brief

We prepare and circulate to dialogue participants an evidence brief that mobilizes relevant research evidence about a problem and its causes, options for addressing it, and key implementation considerations. We use the revised framing of the problem, options to address it and implementation considerations derived from the preparatory consultations to inform searches for relevant data and evidence.

The available research evidence about the problem, options for addressing it and key implementation considerations is sought from a range of sources and types of evidence. The extracted information from the reviews and, where needed, individual studies, identified from these searches are then summarized in the evidence brief along with questions for stakeholders to consider and be prepared to discuss during the dialogue.

Increasingly, we convene one to three [citizen panels](#) in advance of each dialogue and capture the insights in a panel summary, the key messages of which are included in the evidence brief that informs the stakeholder dialogue. This approach allows the values of a diverse group of citizens, chosen with respect to a set of key characteristics, such as age, gender and socio-economic status, and with respect to different types of lived experience with the issue at hand to inform the stakeholder dialogue.

The draft evidence brief is pre-circulated to a selected group of merit reviewers as well as to the steering committee to ensure that the brief appropriately captures the key issues and describes the available data and research evidence in a fair and helpful way and to identify ways to strengthen the evidence brief.

Each evidence brief is made publicly available after the stakeholder dialogue has taken place.

Convening the stakeholder dialogue

For each dialogue, stakeholders are drawn from those who will be involved with or affected by decisions about the issue at hand, and who have the ability of champion action in their constituencies, with the goal of achieving diversity of role (policymaker, manager, researcher, etc.) among participants.

The stakeholder dialogue deliberations are designed to provide ample opportunity to spark the type of insights that can only come about when participants can speak frankly with one another, bound by the Chatham House rule:

“Participants are free to use the information received during the meeting, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.”

Preparing a dialogue summary

We prepare and circulate a dialogue summary, which is a thematic analysis of the deliberations during the stakeholder dialogue. The summary is prepared using notes taken by the facilitator and a dedicated note-taker. Following the Chatham House rule, this summary does not attribute comments to individuals. This document is made publicly available on the Forum's website. We also provide customized post-event briefings to partners involved in funding or convening the dialogue, to further prepare them to address the issue.

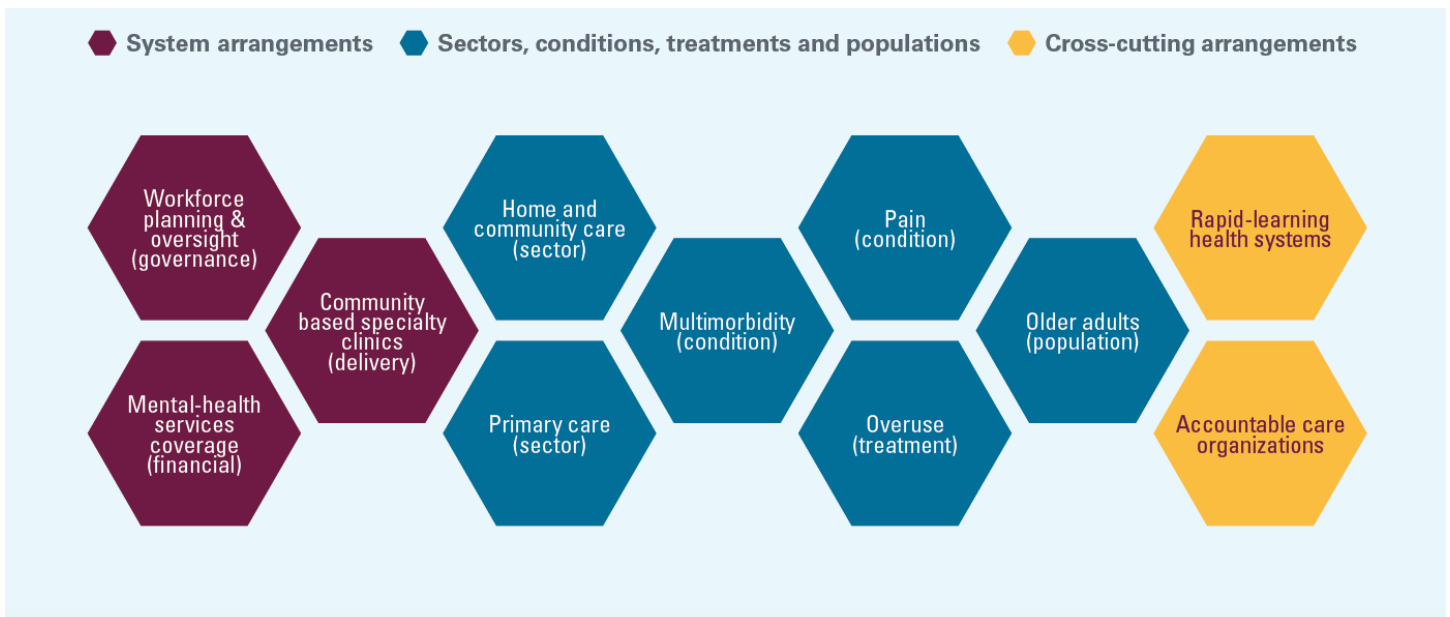
Evaluating the key features of the evidence brief and stakeholder dialogue

We evaluate the key features of the evidence brief and stakeholder dialogue to contribute to our collective understanding about how key stakeholders can best be supported and engaged in shaping how society addresses health and social issues. Our evaluation consists of a survey administered to dialogue participants about key features of the evidence brief, which they complete prior to the attending the dialogue, as well as a survey they complete following the dialogue that asks them to assess the features of the dialogue.

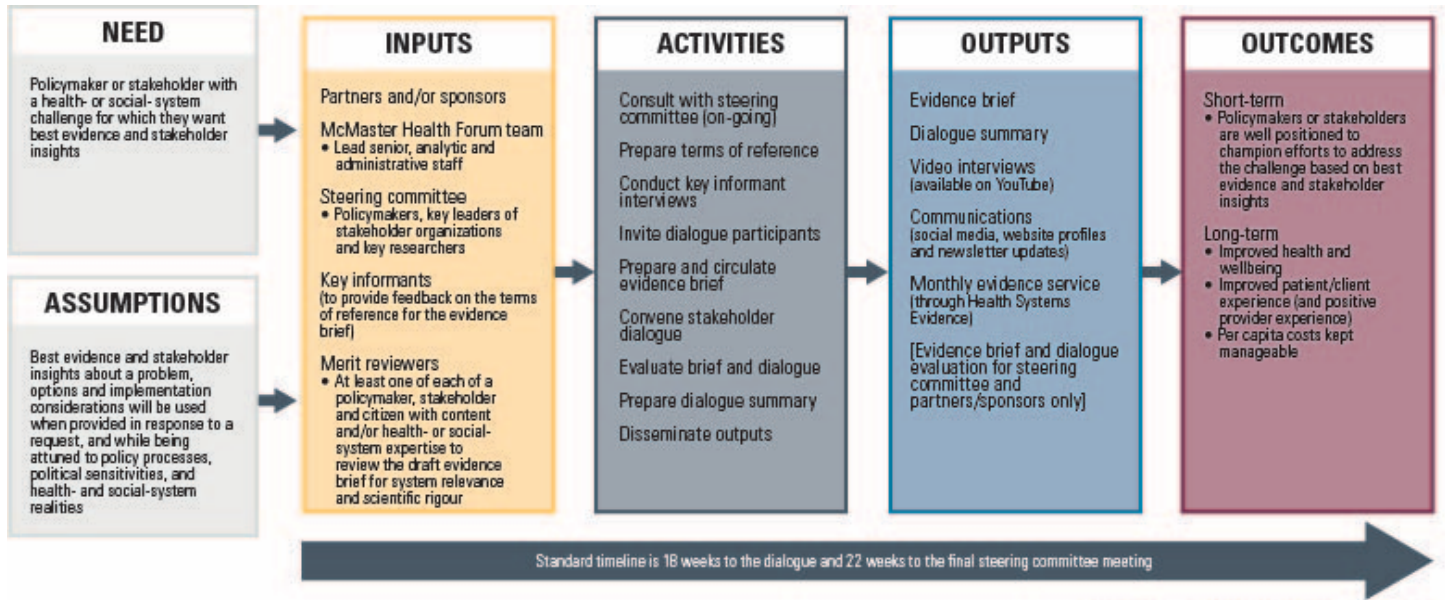
Dialogues have been found through rigorous evaluations to be highly regarded by policymakers and managers, to lead to strong intentions to act on what was learned, and to set agendas and inform both policy choice and policy implementation.

Topic coverage

With the help of 500+ advisors, (e.g., as steering committee members, key informants and merit reviewers), we've addressed a diverse array of topics in local communities, provinces and nationally:



Theory of change/logic model



Contact

For more information on the stakeholder dialogue program, contact forum@mcmaster.ca

Lavis JN. Stakeholder Dialogues program. Hamilton, Canada: McMaster Health Forum, 2019.

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