

# NOVA SCOTIA COUNCIL OF ADVISORS

## Report 2018

The Maritime SPOR SUPPORT Unit's (MSSU) third annual Nova Scotia Council of Advisors – *Health Research Stakeholder Engagement* session was held on February 9, 2018 at the Atlantica Hotel in Halifax. The Council of Advisors session allows the MSSU to connect with community groups, advocacy partners and other health care stakeholders. In past years, Council of Advisors sessions provided an opportunity for these groups to inform the MSSU of issues that affect their organizations, thus guiding the MSSU in establishing research priorities, enhancing research impacts, and building capacity for patient-oriented research in the Maritimes. This year's Council of Advisors session took a different approach, with presentations highlighting research, capacity building, and evaluation.

Sharing the impacts of the MSSU with stakeholders was a significant theme during the session. The morning began with a presentation explaining the spectrum of MSSU's involvement in research. From consultations and acting as members on research teams to supporting and collaborating on MSSU-initiated projects, the MSSU plays many different roles in patient-oriented research. The varying research roles that MSSU fulfills, while adaptable and responsive, also make the selection of appropriate evaluation measures more complex.

A Training and Events update was also provided for participants to demonstrate the MSSU's capacity-building activities. In 2017-2018, formal training in patient-oriented research through workshops, webinars and seminars was complemented by learning opportunities featuring collaboration and skills development. Patient partner Juanna Ricketts, who is involved with the MSSU, United Way and the Canadian Mental Health Association of Halifax-Dartmouth,



*"I enjoyed the opportunity for discussions at the table. It made the knowledge from the talk more relatable to my experiences, and I will remember the information much more clearly."*

shared her personal story. This provided a significant reminder not only of the need for patients' voices in health care research, but of the opportunities to think differently about the ways that the MSSU's research and community impacts can be shared and celebrated. Juanna's talk was extremely well-received.

Dr. Nancy Carter, Director of the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation's REAL Evaluation Services, provided an interactive presentation about evaluation practice. She described the three reasons for undertaking an evaluation – for accountability, for advocacy, or for learning – and explained the importance of understanding how these purposes differ as well as overlap. In addition to sharing several resources on evaluation theory, Dr. Carter noted the growing use in evaluation practice of contribution analysis, where attribution is explored through understanding a program's contribution to observed results. This approach is useful to interpret the MSSU's effect on health care programs and services.

The final activity of the morning was to foster conversation between participants about their past successes with evaluation tools, and to share information about current organizational evaluation practices. Each table discussed and wrote down their comments, attached to poster sheets hung around the room. Feedback suggests participants are aware of evaluation measures, such as surveys, interviews and program reviews, and their respective challenges. Other innovative approaches, like appreciative inquiry, participatory action research and creative testimonials, were cited for their likelihood to enhance evaluations. Further details are outlined in Appendix A.

With several research projects planned or underway at the MSSU, and with emerging requirements for the SUPPORT Unit's evaluation, the Council of Advisors session was a means for the MSSU to provide stakeholders with information about its activities and build capacity to increase the quality of evaluation practice throughout our communities. The MSSU was happy to be able to demonstrate the results of its work to groups in the community, partners in advocacy and other stakeholders pursuing improved healthcare for Canadians.

For more information about the MSSU, visit [www.mssu.ca](http://www.mssu.ca).



# Appendix A

## What evaluation practices have been successful for you/your organization?

*\*Note: responses have been edited for clarity.*

- Online surveys (anonymous)
- Self-declared competencies for course improvement
- Organizational document review (to assess purpose, mission, culture, etc.)
- Before and after program data collection (who is accessing?)
- Interviews/focus groups with key stakeholders
- Incorporating data collection into everyday operational activities – automatic if possible
- Participatory action research – Dalhousie resource
- Economic impact! Cost savings stories - try to quantify savings for future.
- Research Advisory Council of various stakeholders
- Advisory Council involved: during and after establishing indicators
- Working with external partner with evaluation skills to design evaluations – adds objectivity / credibility
- Personal stories of impact to supplement/complement “hard numbers”
- Clearly articulate objectives of program
- Recognizing limitations of goals (regional, timely)
- Creative testimonials – video project.
- Identify/keep an eye out for comparable organizations: what are their challenges? What do they do?
- Reaching out to other organizations for assistance
- Participant goal setting and review every 6 months
- Strategic plan (organization) stakeholder engagement sessions
- Program reports (in our role as founder).
- We apply an internal performance framework to evaluate NSHA services/portfolios at various levels of granularity
- Environmental scan to inform evaluation
- Engaging external stakeholders
- We use predetermined indicators with performance targets and evaluate successful grants
- Reactive instead of pre-emptive
- Different evaluations/reports for funders, donors, members, etc. Outcome measurement. Community Impact. Statistics. Testimonials.
- Core programs social support every 18 months.

## Details of your evaluation practices

- Evaluating theory of change
- Process evaluation (collective impact)
- Program outcomes and outputs (62 programs funded by United Way)
- Developmental evaluation on collective impact
- Interviews (at group and individual level)
- Focus on collaboration among multiple disciplines and professions
- Institute community membership on boards (formerly all researchers/in addition to academics)
- Appreciative inquiry to restructure curriculum (with faculty, students, administrators and community)
- Surveys don't work
- Research Manager and Acting Director roles
- Capacity building – those within a program go through the program to evaluate it (Train-the-trainer/embedded)
- Start evaluation process when designing proposal – design logic model (will change)
- Ongoing – frequent
- We evaluate based on successful application of evidence-based decision-making model, ensuring that measures cover multiple spheres of evidence and overlay IHF triple arm goals to contextualize successes.