Fundamental Changes That Will Contribute To A More Efficient And Effective Delivery Of Public Programs And Services

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For most of the last century, our provincial government, like most in the world, has developed and delivered public programs and public services either directly or by transferring money primarily to public organizations such as hospitals, schools, colleges, and universities.

These organizations consume over eighty percent of all government dollars in most provinces in Canada. While private providers do exist, they tend to receive no or limited funding and they tend to operate under different rules and regulations. They also tend to charge more money to the public for their programs and services. However, this is primarily because they receive little or no government funding. This makes them look more expensive than public providers. In fact, many of them are actually less expensive than public providers, yet they provide the same level and quality of service.

The complexity of government policies and rules, the focus on process reports, and the lack of objective outcome metrics on the quality and cost of services, makes it almost impossible to determine where we, as a society, are getting the best band for our buck.

The following statements present a list of possible innovative approaches that could fundamentally change how governments facilitate the delivery of public programs and services.

1. Provide training and/or consultants that will assist individuals who are responsible for either monitoring or delivering programs and services to strengthen their skills in developing more innovative delivery systems.

2. Move away from essentially a singular provider of service to an environment where the public has many choices of highly qualified public and private providers of public programs and services.

3. Move away from funding institutions, agencies, and organizations, and move to a system where funding follows the client, patient, student, and citizen. This will ensure that where the public chooses to go, so does government funding.

4. Put all public and private providers of programs and services in the same position as far as outcomes are measured and reported. Provide the same level of financial support to service providers delivering the same level and quality of services and meeting the same standards.

5. Reduce the amount of government paperwork such as process focussed reports by ninety percent and focus instead on simple straight-forward reports focussing on results, outcomes, quality of service, and the level of satisfaction experienced by patients, clients, students, and the general public.

6. Have each department conduct an in-depth analysis of all public programs and services delivered on its behalf to determine unit costs. For example, what does it really cost to

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Page 1 of 2

replace a knee or deliver a year of education by one provider vs. another? Add to this the additional financial costs when the operation is not successful or, for example, when a student drops out. This analysis will help make department personnel, elected officials, and the public more aware of what the actual cost to deliver each successful programs and services and where they are getting the best bang for their buck. For example, an in-depth analysis of the cost of one year of university education would not only include the fees a student pays directly to the institution but also the donations the institution received from outside sources. This analysis would further include the funding it has received and continues to receive for capital, such as land, building, equipment, and maintenance. Finally this analysis would include grants it receives and the annual operating funds it also receives. This cost analysis will enable the government to better understand how efficient and effective each service providers is and where improvements can be made.

7. Ensure that the public is able to make more informed and objective decisions of where to obtain government-sponsored programs and services by requiring all institutions, agencies, and organizations that receive government funding to post common metrics on their website that will enable clients, patients, students, and public consumers to compare one provider with others offering a similar product/service. This will increase accountability and make government services more transparent.

8. Challenge all public and private service providers (including health care, education, higher education, and social services) to develop more innovative and creative ways of providing services.

9. Use such tools as Social Impact Bonds, public private partnerships, pilot projects, and demonstration projects to introduce and explore new, innovative, and creative ways to deliver the same programs and services in a more efficient and effective manner that realizes clear financial savings to the overall government budget.

10. Reward and recognize successful innovators and provide them with government support. Meanwhile, begin to reduce financial support to public or private providers who are less willing to change. This may motivate current providers to understand that their funding will continue to decrease unless they change their behaviour.

11. Celebrate and reward government department personnel as well as specific organizations and individuals who clearly contribute to the creation of this new culture.

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Page 2 of 2