

## **PLANNING THE HEALTH WORKFORCE AND SYSTEM BASED ON THE HEALTH NEEDS OF THE POPULATION” – A KNOWLEDGE SYNTHESIS**

G. Tomblin Murphy<sup>1</sup>, A. MacKenzie<sup>1</sup>, S. Price<sup>1</sup>, A. Elliott Rose<sup>1</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>Canadian Health Human Resources Network, Halifax, NS, CAN

### **Objectives:**

To produce a synthesis paper on needs-based HHR and health system planning approaches as part of the CHHRN initiative to produce syntheses on key HHR thematic areas as a tool to provide evidence which decision-makers can use to improve decision-making, policy development and knowledge mobilization. A secondary objective is to use these syntheses to help map a research agenda in its four key thematic areas.

**Methods:** Each of the three Pan-Canadian HHR Network (CHHRN) regional hubs took leadership in developing a synthesis paper on one of the key thematic areas of health human resources. The Eastern Hub, led by Dr. Gail Tomblin Murphy, has developed a paper on “Planning the Health Workforce and System Based on the Health Needs of the Population”. The purpose of this document is to synthesize the existing literature on needs-based HHR and health systems planning. To this end, a systematic review of the peer-reviewed and grey literature on HHR and health systems planning from 1990 through 2012 was conducted, using standardized literature search methodologies. The initial draft of the synthesis was then discussed by a group of Canadian stakeholders representing health care authorities, national health professional organizations and provincial decision-makers to ensure the content was comprehensive and consistent.

### **Findings:**

There is a paucity of published work which explicitly considers needs in estimating HHR or system requirements for planning purposes. Generally, there is evidence that needs-based approaches are considered appropriate, however, implementation appears to be less evident. Critical issues raised in the literature include the inherent difficulties associated with using forecasts as errors are likely, the availability of planning data in general and measures of health care needs specifically, the challenge of obtaining the various types of data required, particularly levels of service, and the need to have strong collaboration between planners and policy makers as well as the collectors, stewards, and analysts of planning data and representatives of health care providers themselves for effective implementation.

### **Conclusions:**

A range of planning methods, frameworks and tools are available to planners and policy makers seeking to make their health care systems more responsive to population health needs. Although there is growing endorsement of the principles of needs-based HHR planning, practical implementation of such methods is only emerging in a few countries. Besides the growth in the number and range of these tools, factors supporting their implementation include improved access and quality of health human resources data that reflect a broad understanding of health, the integration of needs-based health human resources planning into broader health and system planning and improved partnerships between researchers and research users.

### **Potential directions for future research and collaboration include:**

The enhancement of measurement and collection of data on health care needs, including consideration of the potential use of prospective data to inform HHR planning;  
Continuing the evaluation of new and existing models of care delivery and the impact of those models on patient, provider and system outcomes; and  
Evaluation of the performance of needs-based health system and HHR planning policies.