

# **The Story Behind Our Strategy**

**2026–2031**



# About Healthcare Excellence Canada

Healthcare Excellence Canada (HEC) works with partners across the country to shape a future where everyone in Canada has safe and high-quality healthcare. We bring together people, evidence and action to move Care Forward – spreading and scaling quality and safety improvements, strengthening capacity and collective leadership and catalyzing change in policy and practice.

At HEC, healthcare excellence means improving safety, quality and value for everyone. It means care grounded in what matters most to patients, caregivers, communities and people in the workforce. It also means care that respects and responds to First Nations, Inuit and Métis priorities and is culturally safe, equitable and supported by the appropriate use of technology. Together with our partners, we embed these foundations across the health system.

Our work also focuses on expanding access to safe, connected, high-quality care closer to home and community. This includes supporting people with primary health care needs and older adults with health and social needs.

HEC is an independent, not-for-profit charity funded primarily by Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

150 Kent Street, Suite 200

Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 0E4, Canada

1-866-421-6933 • [info@hec-esc.ca](mailto:info@hec-esc.ca)

## Social Media

LinkedIn: Healthcare Excellence Canada

Bluesky: @he-es-canada

Instagram and Facebook: @HE\_ES\_Canada

HEC honours the traditional territories upon which our staff and partners live, work and play. We recognize that the stewardship of the original inhabitants of these territories provides for the standard of living that we enjoy today.

# The Moment We're In: Why This Strategy, Why Now

Not long ago, a small rural hospital was under strain. Emergency visits were rising, staff were exhausted, and older adults were being admitted again and again because supports at home kept falling through.

A local team decided to try something different. They worked with patients and families, tested new ways to coordinate care closer to home, and began to see fewer avoidable emergency visits and repeat hospital stays.

For people in that community, this meant fewer urgent trips to the hospital and greater confidence that they could stay safe at home.

Stories like this show both the real challenges people face and what is possible when care is better connected. And with an aging population and growing pressure on healthcare workers, the need for safe, high-quality care has never been clearer.

The good news is that promising practices already exist across the country, driven by changemakers who are working every day to improve care. Teams across health and community settings are putting patients and communities first, advancing proven approaches that are making a real difference.

The opportunity now is to connect what works and help these approaches spread further and faster, so more people can benefit.

## Healthcare Excellence Canada (HEC) exists for moments like this.

Over the past five years, teams working with HEC have improved care with the potential to benefit more than four million people, including patients, caregivers and those working in healthcare.

These improvements include better access to primary care, helping to reduce unnecessary visits to emergency departments; greater support for older adults to age well in their communities; more personalized care for long-term care residents, leading to reduced inappropriate use of antipsychotic medications; and stronger support for healthcare workers to thrive in their roles.

These results did not happen by chance. They reflect a practical approach to improvement, grounded in the realities of care. By turning learning into action — spreading what works, adapting to local contexts and building capacity for continued improvement — teams are achieving lasting impact at scale across the country.

## The progress we've made together...



through more than

**80,000**

engagements with healthcare leaders



and over

**15,000**

engagements with organizations and communities...

**This sets the stage for even greater impact in the years ahead.**

Now is the time to build that momentum. To invite even more changemakers to join in *moving care forward*. To shape a future where everyone in Canada can count on safe, high-quality healthcare.

**Our refreshed strategy for 2026–2031 is designed to do just that.**

# How This Strategy Was Built

Our 2026–2031 strategy is the result of 18 months of listening and what we've learned through our work over the past five years. While our purpose and values remain unchanged, our refreshed strategy builds on what's worked and sharpens our focus where the need is greatest and the opportunity for impact is strongest.

We heard from more than **1,200 people and organizations across the country**, including patients, caregivers, partners, healthcare providers, policy leaders and staff.

Some have worked closely with HEC for years, while others connected with us for the first time. Together, they shared what is working, where challenges are greatest and what excellence in care needs to look like now and in the years ahead.

## To ensure a wide range of perspectives, we engaged people in many ways, including



Surveys



Postcards



Interviews



Independent public polling



Community outreach

We hosted focused, hands-on accelerated design events in Ottawa, Saskatoon and Québec City; engaged patient and caregiver groups; consulted networks and collaborative participants; involved staff; and completed an independent evaluation of HEC's work.

We started broad, gathering input from across perspectives, and then narrowed our focus through analysis that identified shared priorities, key challenges, and clear opportunities for action.

# What We Heard

What people shared closely reflects what we see in our work every day. As the needs and expectations of people and communities continue to change, there was a clear sense that healthcare excellence must evolve as well. Across conversations, people consistently pointed to better care when patients, staff, leaders and communities build on proven approaches and remain open to new ways of addressing complex challenges.

One of the strongest messages we heard was that *how* HEC works matters just as much as *what* we work on. Partners emphasized the value of HEC's collaborative and inclusive approach, and our role as a trusted, neutral convener and connector — bringing people together, creating space for diverse voices and supporting teams to learn and advance effective practices.

These conversations also surfaced clear priorities for action across the health system. Improving access to care emerged as the top priority across all groups, particularly for older adults. Participants stressed the importance of reflecting the needs, experiences and voices of diverse patients, caregivers and communities, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

At the same time, people described persistent gaps in access to safe, connected, high-quality care, especially care closer to home and in communities. These gaps were most often discussed in relation to two overlapping priorities:

**People with primary health care needs**

**Older adults with health and social needs**

Participants spoke about real pressures in these areas, including difficulty accessing care, disconnected services and an overreliance on emergency departments.

Despite these challenges, there was a strong belief that meaningful improvement is possible. Many people saw these as areas where shared learning and collaboration could lead to better experiences for patients, families and care teams.

**Across all conversations, equity, cultural safety and lived experience came through as non-negotiable. People were clear that these must be embedded in how care is designed, delivered and measured — not treated as optional or add-on considerations.**

What we heard reinforces what we know from our work: lasting improvement depends on trusted relationships, shared learning and collaboration.

When the right people are involved and supported, effective ideas can spread from one community to the next, across regions and care settings. We see this in our work supporting older adults to remain in their communities, reducing the inappropriate use of antipsychotics for people living with dementia and strengthening primary health care in northern, rural and remote communities.

**We learn from what works and what doesn't to help others move faster.**

An independent evaluation of HEC reinforced the value of this approach, showing that teams supported by HEC improved faster than they would have without that support.

Together, what we heard and what we have learned make clear where HEC should focus next — and why continuing to work alongside partners is essential to making a real and lasting difference.



# Our Strategy: Evolving to Meet the Moment

HEC is evolving by sharpening its focus on where it can build momentum and have the greatest impact. Our refreshed strategy sets clear priorities based on what matters most to people and directs action toward those areas.

## 2026–2031 STRATEGY

### OUR PURPOSE

To shape a future where everyone in Canada has safe and high-quality healthcare.

### OUR FOCUS AREAS

To transform **safety, quality and value** across the health sector by integrating:

- ▶ Patient, caregiver and community perspectives
- ▶ People in the workforce perspectives
- ▶ First Nations, Inuit and Métis priorities
- ▶ Cultural safety and equity
- ▶ Appropriate use of technology



To expand access to **safe, connected, high-quality care** closer to home and community for:

People with primary health care needs

Older adults with health and social needs

### OUR PATHS TO IMPACT

We convene and connect people across the country to:

- ▶ Spread and scale quality and safety improvements
- ▶ Strengthen capacity and collective leadership
- ▶ Catalyze policy and practice change

### OUR VALUES

To guide our actions, decisions and culture we:

- ▶ Partner meaningfully
- ▶ Innovate courageously
- ▶ Act with integrity
- ▶ Are inclusive

# What We Are Focusing On: Our Strategic Priorities (2026–2031)

Over the next five years, we will work with partners to continue transforming safety, quality and value across the health system, and expand access to safe, connected, high-quality care closer to home and community.

These two focus areas go hand in hand. One focuses on **how** we define and enable healthcare excellence across the system; the other focuses on **where** HEC can make the greatest impact.



## FOCUS AREA:

# Transforming Quality, Safety and Value Across the Health Sector



Healthcare excellence does not happen by chance. It is built on strong foundations that shape how care is delivered and improved. To strengthen quality, safety and value across the health sector, HEC will embed a clear set of foundations across all our work. Together, these foundations guide how we partner, what we prioritize and how improvement happens in practice.

### **Patient, Caregiver and Community Perspectives**

Care shaped by lived experience and what matters most to people, caregivers and communities — not designed in isolation.

### **People in the Workforce Perspectives**

Care that reflects the realities of people working in healthcare, values the insights of those delivering care and supports their ability to put improvements that strengthen care into practice.

### **First Nations, Inuit and Métis Priorities**

Quality and safety are guided by self-determined priorities, with First Nations, Inuit and Métis leadership and knowledge driving improvement.

### **Cultural Safety and Equity**

Evidence shows that addressing racism and power imbalances in care is essential to fostering trust, avoiding harm and ensuring services are delivered according to need.

### **Appropriate Use of Technology**

As a new and evolving area for HEC, our work supports the thoughtful, safe and equitable use of technology to improve quality, safety and value across the system as digital tools become increasingly embedded in care.

## FOCUS AREA:

# Expanding Access to Safe, Connected, High-Quality Care Closer to Home



Expanding access to care is one of the most important opportunities for improvement across Canada. This includes meeting people's primary health care needs and strengthening care for older adults.

Achieving this kind of access requires more than availability alone. It means getting the right care at the right time. Care must be safe, connected and equitable. Too often, people rely on emergency departments because they cannot get the care and support they need elsewhere.

Over the next five years, our focus is on expanding access to safe, connected, high-quality care closer to home and community for:

### **People with primary health care needs**

For people with primary health care needs, this includes improved access to team-based care and community supports, reduced reliance on emergency departments and medical travel for non-urgent care, and action to address gaps in care for underserved groups. It also includes better coordination across patients, caregivers, providers and services, so care is continuous, culturally safe and responsive to people's goals and circumstances across the care journey.

### **Older adults with health and social needs**

For older adults, this includes health and social services that work together, expanded home- and community-based supports, and better coordination across hospital, home and long-term care. As needs become more complex, care must better support aging in place and caregivers in their roles, while prioritizing respect, independence and quality of life.

By working with partners to spread and scale what works, we will help ensure more people receive timely, person-centred care where it makes the greatest difference — in their homes and communities.

For 2026–2031, we identified three interconnected paths to impact. All are anchored in convening and connecting changemakers — patients, caregivers, communities, healthcare workers, system leaders, policymakers and partners — committed to safer, higher-quality care.

## OUR PATHS TO IMPACT

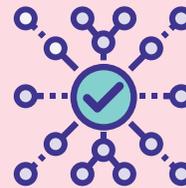
### Spread and Scale Quality and Safety Improvements

We help quality and safety improvements reach more people and more places by connecting teams, sharing knowledge and supporting the application of proven approaches across care settings.

#### In action:

We advance this work through programs and initiatives such as collaboratives, challenges and awards. These support shared learning and help spread effective approaches across the health system, including:

- **Expanding access to primary health care:** Working with team-based primary care organizations to improve access and continuity through programs like Primary Care Access Improvement helping teams strengthen workflows and teamwork so patients get the right care at the right time.



- **Connecting people to community supports through paramedic services:** Supporting community paramedics to use social prescribing to connect clients with local services through initiatives such as Paramedics and Social Prescribing, helping people access non-medical supports that improve health and well-being.
- **Helping older adults age safely at home and in their communities:** Scaling models like Nursing Home Without Walls to support nursing homes and long-term care providers help adults age in place with access to essential services and supports.
- **Improving quality of life in long-term care:** Working with long-term care teams through initiatives like Sparking Change in the Appropriate Use of Antipsychotics to reduce potentially inappropriate antipsychotic use when there is no diagnosis of dementia.

## OUR PATHS TO IMPACT

# Strengthen Capacity and Collective Leadership



Lasting change takes more than good ideas. It depends on people with the skills, confidence and relationships to carry them forward.

HEC strengthens capacity and collective leadership by supporting people at all levels — from local champions to organizational and health system leaders. Our approach recognizes that leadership is shared and built through relationships, and that it grows when people with different perspectives work together to address complex challenges.

### **In action:**

We do this through leadership development initiatives, online and in-person learning opportunities and practical tools and frameworks, including:

- **Leadership development and team-based improvement:** Working with leaders and teams across Canada to build capacity to improve care and sustain change through programs such as EXTRA™: Executive Training Program.
- **Foundations of Healthcare Excellence: Introductory Learning Series:** A self-paced learning series that introduces key perspectives and system conditions that shape care experiences and patient safety. Tools and resources build on this series to support practical application and ongoing capacity building across areas such as cultural safety, engagement-capable environments, equity and patient safety.

## OUR PATHS TO IMPACT

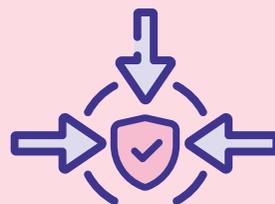
# Catalyze Policy and Practice Change

We convene policymakers, system leaders, providers and people with lived experience to shape policies and practices that enable safer, higher-quality care.

### In action:

HEC creates spaces where evidence, lived experience and system leadership come together through pan-Canadian and regional networks, collaboratives and policy-focused activities. These efforts support dialogue, shared learning and co-design, including:

- **Policy capacity, tools and system resources:** Strengthening quality and safety improvement by addressing key policy levers and building shared capacity across jurisdictions. This includes policy networks and collaboratives (for example, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Government Quality and Patient Safety Network) and targeted policy guidance on priority issues, such as efforts to embed the principles of Rethinking Patient Safety across the system.



- **First Nations, Inuit and Métis and Northern Health System Partnerships:** Building and sustaining respectful, reciprocal relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis leaders, governments and organizations to address self-determined priorities that strengthen cultural safety and humility in health systems. This includes convening the Canadian Northern and Remote Health Network, bringing together decision-makers, leaders and policymakers focused on improving care in northern and remote communities.
- **Truth and Reconciliation Action Plan:** Guided by First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners and advisors, this Action Plan outlines how HEC is addressing racism, supporting cultural safety and humility and strengthening the healthcare system's ability to respond to First Nations, Inuit and Métis needs and priorities. It provides a four-year roadmap to build internal capacity and improve how we work.

# How We Decide Where to Act

HEC is deliberate about where we direct our efforts and who we work with. We recognize that meaningful improvement requires focus — not doing everything, everywhere.

We prioritize programs, initiatives and partnerships that:

- Align with the health priorities of federal, provincial and territorial governments and HEC interest holders
- Build on HEC's unique capabilities and avoid duplicating others' efforts
- Have readiness and capacity to move forward, including committed partners, appropriate resources and realistic timelines
- Have strong potential for reach and impact, including on the quintuple aim: population reach, health system outcomes and improvements in quality and safety

# Call to Action: Building Momentum Together

Our refreshed strategy sets a clear direction for the next five years. **Care Forward is how we bring it to life.**

Care Forward is a pan-Canadian movement that brings people and programs together to scale what works and make a real difference. Through this work, we are building progress that lasts.

Together, we aim to improve outcomes for millions of people across Canada.

Care Forward helps proven, practical approaches move further and faster. It focuses on advancing priority areas identified by people across the country — expanding access to care that meets people's primary care needs, improving care for older adults and advancing quality, safety, equity and value across the health system.

Across Canada, thousands of people are already driving better, safer and more equitable care. As we launch HEC's refreshed strategy, we invite partners, patients, caregivers, communities and healthcare workers to join us in moving care forward.

Let's move care  
forward together —  
so everyone in  
Canada can count  
on safe, high-quality  
care, no matter  
who they are or  
where they live.



# OUR VALUES

Our values guide everything we do – from how we work together, to how we partner, make decisions and advance safe, high-quality care across Canada’s health system. They’ve been with us from the beginning of HEC and haven’t changed. They shape our culture and keep our strategy grounded in trust, collaboration and real improvement for people and communities.

To guide our actions, decisions and culture we:



## Partner meaningfully

We can do more together than on our own. Within HEC and with partners, collaboration accelerates progress towards our shared goals.



## Innovate courageously

We seek and promote bold ideas that deliver meaningful gains in the safety and quality of healthcare, as well as agile approaches to pursuing excellence at HEC.



## Act with integrity

Credibility, honesty and respect matter at HEC. We treat others the way we would like to be treated. Together, we build trust, make evidence-informed choices and support mutual accountability.



## Are inclusive

No matter what we look like or where we live, excellence in healthcare matters to everyone. Within HEC and in our work, we embrace diverse perspectives and the value of each person’s unique experiences.







[HealthcareExcellence.ca](https://HealthcareExcellence.ca)