

Building a Foundation for Health Equity: How to Build an Accountability Agreement

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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.

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Healthcare Excellence Canada 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. [Learn more](#)



Acknowledgements

This resource was co-developed with the insight, experience and generosity of many people. We are grateful to the team members, collaborators, patient and community partners and leaders across health and social systems who contributed their time, wisdom and lived expertise.

The ideas and approaches reflected here do not exist in isolation. They are rooted in and shaped by decades of scholarship, activism and lived experience from

equity-focused practitioners, community organizers, researchers and Knowledge Keepers (past and present) whose work has long been naming and challenging the systems that create inequities in health and care. We are grateful to stand on that foundation and commit to continuing to learn from it.

A full list of contributors involved in the development of these resources is available on [HEC's website](#).



About this resource

An accountability agreement is a shared commitment between a team or organization and the people and communities they work with – a clear statement of what you are working toward together, how you'll make decisions and how you will ensure the work remains guided by community priorities and leadership.

Building an accountability agreement is an important step for engaging in meaningful, community-led equity work. It is a way to establish trust, identify commitments and ensure your work is guided by the priorities and leadership of the people and communities you work with.

This resource is designed to spark reflection and guide your team in planning your own accountability agreement with the communities that you are working with.

Even if you aren't in a formal leadership role, you have a sphere of influence – relationships, knowledge, voice and everyday decisions that you can orient toward equity.

This resource is part of a series of implementation guides that support application of the co-developed [HEC Health Equity Framework](#) to advance equity across health systems and services.

How to use this resource

- Bring together community and patient partners to co-develop the accountability agreement.
- Incorporate what you are collectively committing to under each section when drafting your accountability agreement.

Want to move ahead to implement the HEC Health Equity Framework?

The *How to Plan and Implement Priority Actions* resource can help you and your team tailor your efforts to community priorities, your organizational context, and the resources available.



Why building accountability matters

Meaningful health equity work depends on accountability to the people and communities you are working with. Accountability is important because communities deserve to know that their health priorities and contributions are acted upon. An accountability agreement is a clear statement of the impacts you aim to have in your work and the commitments you make to a meaningful process that works to prevent harm.

Accountability agreements¹ should address these important forms of accountability:

- **Relational accountability** is your accountability to the people you work with. This type of accountability includes accountability among team members and your organization's accountability for the work you do collectively.
- **Community accountability** is your accountability to the people and communities affected by your work – and the actual impact it has on them, no matter how well-intentioned the work.

Building an accountability agreement requires that we:

- build and strengthen relationships with the people and communities we serve.
- bring together everyone involved in the initiative to build the accountability agreement, including patient and community partners.

- plan to revisit the accountability agreement with community and patient partners as the initiative progresses.
- reflect on our own roles and responsibilities in advancing health equity – and how these shape our accountability.

The people and communities you work with are essential partners in identifying what their priorities are related to health equity. Your work should be accountable to addressing those goals.

When producing an accountability agreement, be mindful of word choice. Remember that professional jargon can exclude people from your work. Instead, choose clear and direct language that reflects respect and humility.



¹ <https://solidarityeconomyprinciples.org/theme-collective-care-relationships-and-accountability/>

Worksheet: Building blocks for your accountability agreement

Before working through the questions below, bring together people with the lived and living experiences of patients, caregivers and communities. From the start, explore these questions together, with everyone's perspectives shaping the conversation.

You do not need to complete this over one session. Work through the questions that feel most relevant to where you are right now and return to the others as your work evolves.

1. Who are we accountable to?

These questions help you identify who this work is in service of and what accountability means in your specific context.

- Who are we accountable to?
- What does accountability look like within your specific role and sphere of influence?
- What can you commit to right now, and what will need support or resources from others to move forward?

Our commitment:

2. Resources and sustainability

These questions help you think honestly about what you need to do this work well and how you can sustain it over time.

- What resources are needed to create and uphold this accountability agreement, for example, people, funding, time and labour?
- Do we have access to the resources we need, and can we sustain them throughout this work?

What we'll resource and sustain:

3. Relational and community accountability

These questions focus on how you will show up in relationships with each other, with communities and when things get hard. Building and sustaining relationships is part of the work we do to advance equity.

- Can we commit to maintaining good relationships throughout this work?
How will we do this?
- How will we collectively handle challenges or conflict when things do not go as planned?
- Can we commit to maintaining good relationships within communities throughout this work? How will we do this?
- What organizational barriers or resistance might we face in this work, and how will we address them?

How we'll show up:

4. Grounding in values and meaningful outcomes

These questions connect your accountability agreement back to the HEC Health Equity Framework and to what matters most to the people and communities you work with.

- How will the HEC Health Equity Framework's guiding commitments shape our work and be demonstrated in practice?
- Can we commit to being accountable to outcomes defined as meaningful by the people and communities we work with?
- How will we create ongoing opportunities for people and communities to define, assess and communicate what meaningful outcomes look like? And through what channels will we receive and act on their input?

Tip: Being accountable to meaningful outcomes might mean pausing, rethinking and adjusting your approach as you go.

How we'll stay accountable to what matters:

Next step

Now that you have worked through all of the questions as a group, in a few sentences capture what you're committing to, who you're accountable to and how you'll check in and respond if things need to change.

Our accountability agreement:

We will revisit this agreement on:

Resources to support learning



[**Tamarack Institute's Accountability Matrix Guide**](#) (specifically pages 7 and 8). The goal of this tool is to provide a framing for collaborations to consider, and to support them in understanding and deploying their governance structure more effectively.



[**The Solidarity Economic Principles' Collective care, Relationships and Accountability**](#). This project offers a set of principles and practices.



[**Soul Fire Farm's community feedback form**](#). This community feedback form provides a sample for your organization to work with.



[**The Assembly of Seven Generations' Accountability in Our Lifetime**](#). This document is a call to honour the rights of Indigenous children and youth.



[**HEC Patient Engagement Framework**](#). This framework outlines the ways individuals and organizations can embed patient, caregiver and community perspectives into programming, activities and initiatives.