



Tri-Region Area - Stony Plain, Spruce Grove and Parkland County Community Team - Pandemic Response

Case Study

Background

In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the enforcement of physical distancing was a first line of defense. Although the physical safety of all persons was of utmost priority, the public health measures protecting us impacted individual mental health, and the psychosocial aspects of our lives. Due to broad impacts of the pandemic, and the nature of needs arising, community-level response was required in order to act quickly and efficiently. Multi-sector community teams became key in local response efforts. Through the pandemic's progression, older adults were identified as being one of the most susceptible, and disproportionately affected groups. Persons living with dementia and their care givers were, and continue to be, among some of the most vulnerable. As people were becoming more isolated in order to protect against COVID-19, their needs were evolving. In a time when physically 'being apart' was essential, it was imperative for individuals to find a way to 'come together' to ensure no one was alone, or struggling to meet basic human necessities. COVID-19 has impacted all communities, but rural communities were uniquely impacted due to their geographic location, and pre-existing realities of having limited resources. Communities have, in many ways, been left to adopt their own unique ways to respond to the pandemic. During these challenging times it is important to showcase how through leveraging and adapting existing community infrastructures and resources, multi-sector community teams were able to find creative ways of meeting emerging needs of those living in their respective communities affected by dementia.

WestView Dementia Collaborative

The rural Alberta Tri-Region Area (Stony Plain, Spruce Grove and Parkland County) was presented with new and evolving challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed. Recognizing what the resulting needs of community members were, and how to address them became a pertinent and ongoing endeavor. It was evident that a specific focus was necessary for some of the Tri-Region Area's most vulnerable constituents, such as older adults, and including those affected by dementia. An "all hands on deck" approach was needed in order to determine the best way for the Tri-Region Area communities to respond. One of the area's shining assets was the already existing strong connections across the three communities where services and resources had worked together on a variety of projects in the past (i.e. poverty, elder abuse, housing instability). Multiple inter-agency groups such as the public libraries, the





rotary club, the municipalities and the Westview health center were familiar with working together to achieve a common goal of benefiting the residents of the Tri-Region Area. The *WestView Dementia Collaborative* chaired by the Stony Plain Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) was an already established group within the Tri-Region Area when the pandemic commenced. This regional inter-agency partnership consisted of individuals representing multiple sectors (i.e. health care, social, community) including the Stony Plain FCSS, Alzheimer's Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories, WestView Primary Care Network, Alberta Health Services, WestView Health Center, Geriatric Assessment Team, Home Care, and community members. The focus of this group was on expanding community awareness and incorporating new strategies to create a friendly environment for people living with dementia. The strength of the Tri-Region Area's cross-organization connections, including those developed through the *WestView Dementia Collaborative*, fostered a comprehensive approach to the Tri-Region municipalities' COVID-19 response.

As a result of previously developed relationships and trust built through community partnerships, engaging with the residents of the Tri-Region Area to identify essential needs was more easily attainable. Collecting diverse perspectives from across sectors (such as FCSS, community volunteers, clinic staff, etc.) provided a richer understanding of those most at risk and helped determine what was required within the communities to meet the identified needs. The challenges were then able to be addressed as a whole through collaboration within the close-knit community structure. Having worked together before, multi-sector and interagency groups such as the *Westview Dementia Collaborative* and its respective members, were ready to tackle challenges together rather than individually.

Supporting Engagement

Calling on the resources and services already established, and adapting them to meet the emerging needs was a vital component of response measures. The *WestView Primary Care Network* recognized the need for more supports and developed the *Community Connector (Adult)* position. They offered numerous virtual education programs where participants could attend in the comfort and safety of their own homes. FCSS shortened the timeline to launch new programming addressing social isolation and were able to pivot to online, phone and virtual platforms. The *Let's Talk Dementia* program was one example of programming that switched to virtual delivery. The *Dementia Friendly Community* project led by the *WestView Dementia Collaborative*, launched the *Dementia Connections* program earlier than planned in response to the pandemic. This program consisted of volunteer *Community Champion Connectors* being trained through online portals and offering supports for those affected by dementia. The *Caring Hearts Connection* program, focusing on being a safety net for residents to connect to supports during times of crisis, was created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This program was





able to recruit 60 participants and eight volunteers for friendly phone calls and check-ins. In addition, online training sessions were developed for volunteers interested in becoming a Senior Connector through the *SeniorConnect* program. The Senior Connectors were crucial support in helping with social engagement, targeting isolation as well as offering information and resources to recipients. The *Neighborhood Connect* program continued and encouraged neighbours checking in with neighbours. Even with new socially restrictive guidelines the program offered other ways neighbours could connect with one another despite the need to physically distance. *Connector Info Cards* could be retrieved online by Neighbourhood Connectors, filled out and placed at neighbour's doors. These cards acted as a safe means to create an initial contact between neighbours and promote social engagement (i.e. share contact information so they can be in touch by telephone). Despite the need for physical distancing, community organizations and groups in the Tri-Region Area found creative ways to keep local residents engaged and connected, thereby promoting their mental and psychosocial health and wellbeing.

Summary

Regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic's unfavorable outcomes, the Tri-Region Area's strong community connections, including those developed through, and supported by the *WestView Dementia Collaborative*, were well equipped to provide the appropriate support to community members of Stony Plain, Spruce Grove and Parkland County. By multiple sectors working together to plan and adapt within the context of the global pandemic, the Tri-Region Area demonstrated its ability to gain a deep understanding of the needs of its most vulnerable individuals. Kitty Choi, the WestView PCN Community Connector (Adult) who is also a member of the *Westview Dementia Collaborative* says, "Working within the collaborative I find that we work together to leverage resources, easily identify gaps, and avoid duplication. The work of this Collaborative is so efficient." By banding together, community organizations had the ability to accumulate resources to meet local evolving needs. The resilience demonstrated by the Tri-Region Area, and the strong multi-sectoral relationships within, showcases how the municipalities of Stony Plain, Spruce Grove and Parkland County were able to respond to, and overcome, some of the most unimaginable circumstances while keeping those most vulnerable at the forefront of their endeavors.

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