

Integrating Ontario Health and Social Services Data to for Research and Policy Development

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Introduction

Integrating health and social services data is critical to understanding social determinants of health and responding to public expectations for evidence-based policies amidst changing demographics and fiscal constraint.

While academia has long understood the importance of social determinants of health, real and perceived obstacles have slowed their evaluation in Ontario.

Objectives and Approach

This report describes how the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) and the Ministry and Community and Social Services (MCSS) have partnered to bring social services data and health data together to better understand the Ontario population and better support decision makers across various sectors.

We present how ICES and MCSS tackled barriers to data access and cultural challenges to data sharing in the Ontario context, provide an overview of their unique data and research partnership - including the new collaboration research and data access platforms created, highlight research findings to date, and identify key topics of interest moving forward.

Results

Over the last decade, ICES and MCSS have led the way in Ontario linking health administrative and social services data. An initial single year linkage enabled the success of the Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities project. This cross-sectoral initiative provided a clearer sense of how people with developmental disabilities experienced health care in Ontario.

Building on this work, ICES and MCSS recently expanded their partnership bringing together 15 years of social services and health data through a broader data sharing agreement. This agreement allows greater data access to researchers. In addition, ICES and MCSS have been successful in creating a new integrated research platform that will increase the depth

and quality of health and social services research and policy evaluation in Ontario.

Conclusion/Implications

A broader collaborative research community will now be able to answer questions of interest, do self-directed integrated data analytics and leverage respective program data expertise to tackle joint research projects. Importantly, MCSS analytics teams will now also have access to linked data on this platform to conduct their own research.

