

# **ROUNDTABLE ON JOINT SERVICE DELIVERY IN CANADA AND OTHER FEDERATIONS**

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Report by

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The purpose of this report is to provide a thematic overview of the presentations and discussion at the above-noted roundtable. For further details, see the [presentations](#) and the [program](#).

## **What does joint service delivery mean?**

A number of definitions were suggested, including:

- Integration of complementary or parallel services offered by different units in one or more governments, sometimes organized according to “life events” – e.g. birth, marriage, starting a business
- Real or virtual co-location of related services – not necessarily involving any other form of integration
- Integration of multiple service delivery channels (e.g. telephone, face-to-face, online)
- Partnering with information technology (IT) vendors who deliver some services being delivered by the public sector
- Development of “wrap-around services” through funding and facilitating alliances of community-based service providers – thus more focus on the integration of local service providers, both public and not-for-profit.
- Development and integration of different “tiers” of service (e.g. one-way information provision; opportunities for payment; processes to carry out transactions – e.g. issuing of licences.

## **What is the emerging vision for joint service?**

Related to the above, participants put forward a variety of desirable goals or end points for joint service delivery. For instance, obstacles experienced in integrating complementary services provided by traditional service delivery departments (e.g. transport, housing, health, social services) in one or more governments appear to be making the prospect of fostering community-based wrap-around service arrangements more attractive. Similarly, the costs and frustrations associated with large back office and channel integration partnerships with IT vendors may mean that in a time of spending restraint these fall out of favour and attention shifts to other more economical and attainable outcomes. In general, it was noted that cost reduction was displacing service improvement as a key selling point for service transformation.

**Why does collaboration continue to be such a significant challenge?**

Effective collaboration remains a key factor in creating successful networks of service deliverers within a single government, between sectors and across jurisdictions (on the latter, see also below). Despite efforts that have been put into building and sustaining such collaborations, a number of commentators suggested that significant barriers remain. There were indications that government departments continue to resist service transformation partnerships. This was traced to territoriality, perceived cultural differences between potential partners, transaction costs required to build and maintain partnerships, the persistence of funding models that focus expenditures on traditional departments and units instead of collaborative ventures, etc. There was talk of the need to empower collaborative efforts more effectively so that employees can make needed alterations in partnership arrangements without revisiting formal agreements, etc. Resistance to collaboration is also a driver of the increasing focus on supporting collaboration in joint service delivery at the community level.

**Is cost becoming a more significant factor in potential moves to joint service delivery?**

While all governments are cutting back, there were different perspectives on the impact this would have on service transformation initiatives. Some argued that the cost and risks associated with large IT-based projects would make them a less attractive option. Others indicated that for initiatives focused on priority areas such as enhancing services to business, money would be available despite cutbacks. There seemed to be some disagreement on the cost impact of IT-based service transformation strategies. It was argued that online service provision, for instance, was demonstrably cheaper. But there is also evidence that the capital costs and risks associated with building systems capable of supporting complex service transactions were still an issue. Overall, it was noted (see “Vision” question above) that cost cutting is displacing citizen-centred service enhancement as a major driver of service reform. Some argued that this would have a negative impact on joint service delivery by causing traditional service departments to retreat to the protection of core activities. If cost reduction is a priority, then integration is often viewed as a strategy leading to job cuts within the integrating units. This, it was argued, would cause resistance in traditional service delivery units.

**Is access still an issue?**

There was significant emphasis on “channel migration” and the goal of moving as many services as possible online. There was also discussion of the prospects for taking on the integration of more complex social and health services. Combining both thrusts to make the delivery of social services “virtual” raises important access issues in a large country with a diversified population that is still significantly rural and increasingly old. Many social and health services focus on populations (e.g. lower income, First Nations, dependent elderly, mentally deficient, etc.) who have limited access to sophisticated online capacity. These factors raise questions about the feasibility of channel migration and the costs associated with maintaining multiple service channels.

**Where should leadership come from?**

This was an interesting thread throughout the day. A number of participants expressed concern about the continuing lack of political interest in Canada in service transformation. Some participants argued that decisive political leadership was crucial to moving service transformation initiatives forward in the face of bureaucratic resistance. Others argued that progressive public servants had been the main drivers of service transformation in Canada and that there were advantages in “flying below the radar.” Still others argued that the real action was at the community level where collaborative leadership among smaller local organizations (mostly municipal and non-profit) was the key. As noted by Tony Dean and Marie Boutilier, there are many pathways to successful service transformation.

**How important is citizen engagement?**

Although there was some discussion about obtaining the views of clients and the broader public through “satisfaction surveys,” there was much more focus on engaging citizens in more meaningful ways in the design, implementation and evaluation of new service delivery models. The Dean-Boutilier presentation led to discussion of co-production – tapping the knowledge, experience and expertise of service users, practitioners and community members in the enhancement of services. This is obviously a more democratic, collaborative and demanding approach. There was a brief discussion of the possibility of using co-production processes to open up discussions of demand management – i.e. engaging citizens more comprehensively in dialogues about how to reform service delivery by reducing the demand for services.

**Is privacy protection becoming a more serious issue?**

This was raised by one speaker as an increasingly frustrating problem in the development of online service delivery. A number of participants have experienced privacy protection issues, especially as governments move away from improving simple transactional services to take on health and social services where the protection of personal data is more critical.

**What factors are leading to interjurisdictional service integration?**

In Canada, as in most other federal systems, the federal and provincial/territorial governments often both have programs, and deliver services, within some of the same policy fields – e.g. social services. Particular sectors, such as business, regularly carry out transactions with more than one order of government. In light of citizen expectations for timely, accessible and transparent services, governments have good reason to move towards interjurisdictional integration, or at least coordination. In some provinces, e.g. Ontario, there is a growing focus on collaboration with municipal governments. Cost has perhaps not been the main driver of progress to date in this area, but it may become a more significant factor in light of the budgetary restrictions all governments are facing.

**What challenges does interjurisdictional service integration present?**

Efforts to advance interjurisdictional collaboration face some of the same challenges as initiatives to join up services within single governments – e.g. territoriality, concerns about reduced budgets and staff, privacy. However, additional issues arise. Governments

(and ministers) may be concerned about loss of visibility and recognition for ‘their’ programs. There are also questions about who is accountable for problems that may arise when service channels are integrated.

**What factors have led to progress in interjurisdictional service integration?**

As with many service delivery reforms within single governments, interjurisdictional service integration efforts have not often been led from the political level. One exception would be the tax harmonization agreements reached between the federal government and several provinces (in some cases, with the involvement not only of ministers but first ministers). In other fields, progress has been incremental and led largely by public servants, as reflected in Service Canada’s approach. The federal-provincial-territorial bodies, including a deputy ministers table, provide a channel for sharing good practices and other information about service delivery reform. Learning from others, which is consistent with the concept of federalism as a laboratory, can help open the door to joint initiatives. That said, leadership and vision need to be present in order to overcome some of the obstacles mentioned above.

**Can we expect further progress on interjurisdictional service integration?**

In his commentary, Gilles Paquet suggested (drawing on recent annual reports from the Clerk of the Privy Council) that Service Canada is devoting less effort than previously to interjurisdictional service integration. In this regard, current demands to reduce the cost of government may pressure Service Canada to focus on achieving savings through further consolidation of the federal government’s own services (this is a main rationale for the establishment of Shared Services Canada). However, citizen expectations for enhanced accessibility (e.g. through mobile devices) will remain high, and governments may need to make further progress across levels as well as horizontally. Greater collaboration between provincial and municipal governments may hold promise, and initiatives that are underway or in the planning stage could provide some useful lessons.