

**IAP2 Core Values Award
Organization of the Year Application**

Canadian Blood Services
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“The strength of Canadian Blood Services is largely due to the engagement of stakeholders and the public in our decision making. To gain and maintain trust, it is critical that our Board and our executive management are open, available and attentive to the people that we serve.”

Dr. Graham Sher, Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Blood Services

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, thousands of Canadians received blood and blood products that were contaminated with two infectious viruses, Hepatitis C and HIV, resulting in many deaths and Canada’s largest public health crisis. A commission of inquiry was launched, led by Justice Krever from which a comprehensive report called for a new, national blood operator in Canada.

Justice Krever made many recommendations for the new blood system in Canada; including safety, finance, research and development and blood utilization. In addition, he made recommendations on public confidence and accountability, ***“The public must have access to information about the policy, management and operations of the blood supply system and be represented in the decision making.”*** These recommendations set the stage for a new blood system that would be safe, open, inclusive and accountable to the public from that point forward.

It Started Early and it Started at the Top

In the words of our CEO, Dr. Graham Sher, *“Our mission was clear from day one, we had to turn the ship away from the iceberg and regain the trust that had been completely eroded.”* The stage for rebuilding trust was set with our mission statement, developed by the Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Health; “Canadian Blood Services operates Canada’s blood supply in a manner that gains the trust, commitment and confidence of all Canadian by providing a safe, secure, cost-effective, affordable and accessible supply of quality blood, blood products and their alternatives.” However, the Board of Directors and Dr. Sher knew that it would take more than words to bring the commitment to life. It would take shared values, developed by our staff; “We believe in: Safety, Integrity, Quality, Respect, Excelling, Accountability and Openness” and it would take a commitment to live these values in all of our business practices.

Embracing the Principles and Values of Public Participation

The incoming executive team was committed from the beginning to engaging the entire range of stakeholders in the blood system, including staff, volunteers, patients, hospitals, health care professionals, advocacy groups, and the public. To begin with, members of the executive management team, including the CEO and board members, travelled across the country to meet with staff and volunteers. Ongoing mechanisms for employee involvement were set up that include *Town Hall Meetings* across Canada, *Brown Bag Lunches* with Dr. Sher, CEO and *Ask EMT*, an anonymous electronic question forum that is responded to by executive management. In addition, editorial board meetings were set up with every major newspaper in Canada, outlining the organization's plan for rebuilding the blood system. Two board meetings per year were opened to the public, public presentations were encouraged at all board meetings and two positions on the Board of Directors were designated to represent consumers of blood products.

Of equally critical importance to Canadian Blood Services was the early establishment of an ongoing stakeholder engagement strategy. One of the key mechanisms is the Liaison Committees. The ***National Liaison Committee*** (NLC) is made up of external stakeholders, acts as an advisory committee to the Board of Directors and is co-chaired by the two Consumer Representative Members of the Board. In addition to their regularly scheduled meetings, the committee also meets on a yearly basis with the full Board of Directors. Members include representatives from national organizations such as consumer groups, patient groups, health care professionals, hospitals, partners, sponsors and delegates from each of seven Regional Liaison Committees.

The ***Regional Liaison Committees*** (RLCs) ensure that Canadians have an opportunity to raise concerns and contribute to decision making on issues affecting the blood system on a local or regional basis. One member from each RLC represents their committee's interests on the NLC. The RLCs meet biannually and report jointly to the Director Donor & Clinic Services of the respective catchment area and the Office of Public Involvement at Canadian Blood Services' Head Office. Members on the RLC include blood donors, volunteers, sponsors, health care professionals and blood patient groups.

In addition to the standing liaison committees, Canadian Blood Services regularly schedules consultations and consensus conferences on issues of importance to the Canadian public, blood donors, patients and health care professionals. Past consultations have included a review of donor deferral policies, Transfusion Related Acute Lung Injury, plasma protein products, umbilical cord blood banking and organ and tissue donation and transplantation in Canada.

Canadian Blood Services has also implemented mechanisms that allow the public to directly communicate with and provide feedback to the organization; one electronic format and one through comment cards that are provided at the blood clinics across the country. Feedback and issues that are directed to the CEO, or members of the board are responded to by them allowing the public access to the decision makers at Canadian Blood Services.

Examples of the Impact of Public Participation on Decisions

Inclusive decision-making at Canadian Blood Services has evolved to the point where the decision-makers of the organization consult at every feasible opportunity. In fact, examples of the impact of public participation are evident in most major decisions the organization makes. Following are some examples:

1. As a result of the tainted blood tragedy in the 1980s, blood operators around the world implemented a policy that did not allow donations from any man who answered yes to the question: have you had sex with a man even one time since 1977? This policy was implemented prior to the establishment of Canadian Blood Services, is still in effect and is highly controversial. As part of an ongoing policy review, Canadian Blood Services established a consensus conference in 2001 to consult with patient groups, health care professionals, human rights activists and others on the policy. The outcomes of this consensus conference, *Optimizing the Donor Selection Process* were published in *Vox Saguine* in 2002 and recommended no change to the policy with future re-evaluation as science evolved. In 2007, in keeping with the outcomes of the conference, Canadian Blood Services began a second review of the policy. As part of this review, the Board of Directors commissioned an independent risk assessment, reviewed international policies, and examined surveillance data. In addition, a comprehensive consultation strategy was launched with members of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered community (GLBT), student groups, human rights activists and others who felt marginalized by this policy. In addition, patient groups, advocates for safety, health care professionals, donors, volunteers and community members were consulted to gather their views and input as well. The outcomes of the consultations, which identified a number of gaps in knowledge, were presented to the board for consideration. After careful review of the stakeholder input, the Board of Directors agreed with the stakeholders that further research was required before a change could be considered to the current deferral policy. In direct response to the input of stakeholders, that research is now underway.
2. Plasma Protein Products Vendor Selection – Recently, Canadian Blood Services determined that an additional vendor for the production of plasma/blood based products was necessary to protect against a potential supply interruption. Patients who use these plasma based products were engaged to participate in the vendor selection. These patients had full input into the entire selection process and could ensure that whatever vendor was chosen, their interests and concerns were addressed prior to finalizing the new contract.
3. Diversity Liaison Committees – Canadian Blood Services has recognized that the demographic of Canada is changing and that there is an immediate need to increase participation in the blood program and the OneMatch Stem Cell Network of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In keeping with our commitment to involving stakeholders in the decisions, we have established Diversity Liaison Committees in three major Canadian cities to advise the organization as to how to proceed. These Committees developed their own Terms of Reference and have been empowered to determine the methods and approach for outreach into their communities.

How Canadian Blood Services Lives the Core Values

The public should have a say in decisions about actions that could affect their lives: This document has outlined some of the ways Canadian Blood Services involves Canadians in the

decision-making. Early on, the decision to involve Canadians was driven by public scrutiny and mistrust. Since then, public involvement has been driven by a need for effective decision-making. As such, consultation strategies are part of all decisions that could affect the lives of Canadians.

Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision: There are four critical elements to the public promise: 1. Timing –Canadian Blood Services will involve the public at a point when their input can influence the outcome. 2. Honesty – the public will be informed of the level of influence their input will have on the decision. 3. Openness – the public will be provided with all relevant information on the topic. 4. Commitment – Canadian Blood Services will advise the public how their input was used.

Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers. Decision makers at Canadian Blood Services understand that to make good decisions, they must be fully informed of all the needs and interests of the public. All public participation strategies ensure that feedback from all interested parties is gathered and considered, including assenting and dissenting views.

Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision. For major decisions, the Public Relations team develop comprehensive public engagement strategies. Within these strategies all affected stakeholders are identified, analyzed and the level of involvement (per the IAP2 spectrum) is determined. Stakeholders are engaged to identify additional participants and engagement techniques are used to facilitate the involvement of those affected by, or interested in, the decision.

Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate. The National and Regional Liaison Committees regularly determine their own participation levels in various issues. From designing the Terms of Reference for their own committee to determining appropriate representation. In addition, all committee members receive regular updates of upcoming issues at Canadian Blood Services, whereby they are able to identify upcoming issues that they would like to have input on and the level of input they wish to have. Canadian Blood Services ensures that their interests are heard on any topic they bring forward.

Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way. Prior to any consultation or engagement activity, participants are provided with all the information available on the issue, including what is available to the Board of Directors. Additionally, information is often posted on our website to further contribute to openness, transparency and an informed public. Participants are welcome to suggest or request additional information that they deem appropriate. Presentations are provided by subject matter experts to set the stage for discussions and input. The decision makers at Canadian Blood Services believe that transparency is the cornerstone of trust and that the public and stakeholders have a right to be fully informed on issues affecting the blood system.

Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision. Informing participants of the impact of their input is entrenched within each standing committee and every public consultation strategy. Participants are kept informed through e-mail communications and/or follow-up meetings and teleconferences. Further, each year stakeholders are surveyed to determine not only their satisfaction with the engagement process but also their understanding of how their input affected decisions. This measurement allows us to monitor our closing the loop mechanisms and make improvements as necessary. In 2007, 91% of stakeholders rated Canadian Blood Services as effective in ensuring they have the opportunity to provide input into the decision making.

Evaluating Public Participation

Canadian Blood Services evaluates public participation in a number of different ways. At the completion of each public participation initiative, participants are asked to complete evaluation forms which are then reviewed by the public participation practitioners, communicated to the decision-makers and shared with the participants. In addition, following each strategy, a de-brief takes place between the decision makers and the P2 practitioners to ensure that the level of involvement and the promise to the public were met. Regular measurement allows us to continue to enhance our public participation initiatives, so in addition to consultation evaluations, regular comprehensive surveys of participants are conducted. These surveys measure the performance of the stakeholder committees against the Terms of Reference which reflect the IAP2 Core Values. Further, the evaluations also measure Canadian Blood Services' public participation activities against other public participation leaders and other non-profit agencies. Results of all evaluations are communicated to the participants as well as to the Board of Directors and the Executive Management Team. The public is also polled quarterly to determine impact on overall trust measures, which our most recent poll indicates that 7 out of 10 Canadians are more confident in the blood system than they were ten years ago when Canadian Blood Services was launched. All formal measures are tracked on our Balanced Scorecard under the key objective of "*Involve Canadians in our decision making and tell them our story*" and reported to the public through our stakeholder committees, website and annual report.

From inception, Canadian Blood Services has actively operated in an open and collaborative manner with Canadians. The organization believes that this commitment is essential to ensuring a safe and effective blood system that is trusted by the public that it serves.

References:

David Page, Executive Director Canadian Hemophilia Society – dpage@hemophilia.ca
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