

What is partnership working?

Partnership working refers to a broad range of actions and can easily be defined as two or more groups coming together to achieve a common purpose. It is not necessarily a 50/50 division of power or financial responsibility but there is always some degree of spreading control or influence. (Community Change 2010)

Partnerships are often formed to address specific issues and may be short or long term. The key principles of partnership working are, openness, trust and honesty, agreed shared goals and values and regular communication between partners. Partnership working is at the heart of the agenda for improving outcomes and making local services cost effective.

"Partnerships are about the recognising the value in each other" (Dr Hugh Annett 2012)

What general principles could help organisations to facilitate and create better partnerships?

Identify bespoke solutions: different problems require specific local partnerships to find specific local solutions. There is no single type of partnership that fits all solutions.

Structure matters less than purpose: Getting the structure right can be a never-ending and futile quest. Partnerships need to be flexible and adapt to the issues or tasks.

Focus on outcomes: One way to make partnerships more successful is to become more outcome focused and define the purpose or added value of partnerships from the outset. The true value of partnerships value lies in what they can add to a project through shared objectives, aims and outcomes.

Pool budgets where appropriate: Pooling budgets may be part of the answer, and already happens, but their potential is often not fully exploited. Key Principles for Partnership Working (Scottish Government)

Clarify responsibilities: In most partnerships it's unclear who's responsible or accountable for what does and doesn't happen.

Give partnerships time to yield results: It can take time to see the outcomes from partnerships. This is partly because it takes time to establish trust and joint methods of working.

"Working in partnership is central to reducing health inequalities – one department acting alone cannot tackle an issue that does not respect organisational boundaries."

Adapted from the King's Fund website



Benefits of partnership working...

Partnership working allows services to be delivered in a joined up way. This has benefits both strategically, in terms of providing a well balanced service and operationally in terms of:

Joint Service Delivery: Bringing together the various parts of service delivery provides a unique opportunity to develop new and innovative approaches and local service provision and allows for a wider ownership.

Efficiency: Sharing resources and resulting economies of scale can be achieved as service providers pool not only resources, but effort and managerial time.

Common purpose: Through coming together and focusing on a common goal, a shared vision is formed of what partners want to achieve and how they want to achieve it. Service users can often influence the service.

Momentum: Partnership working coordinates action between organisations and allows opportunities to exchange views, supporting innovation and providing additional momentum to get things done.

Attracting funding: Partnership working also allows many organisations to access funding and comply with Government requirements.

Effectiveness: In time, partnership working can add a 'special touch' to the delivery of a given service, over and above the time and resources that have gone into its provision.

Health inequalities and partnership working

Health inequalities are produced by the unequal distribution of health determinants. These determinants include factors such as socio economic conditions, built and natural environment and living and working conditions. There is growing evidence and understanding that working across department, sectors, agencies and communities is key to tackling health inequalities. Recent regional publications in particular the draft Public Health strategy 2012—2022 highlight this a crucial way of addressing health inequalities.

'To be effective this strategy will require buy in not just from executive departments but , crucially, broad cross sectorial buy in at regional and local levels including from key organisations and from individuals and local communities...' (DHSPSS, 2012)

References

Community Change (2010) *Working Together Effectively . A Basic guide to partnership working options and opportunities*. Belfast
DHSPSS NI (2012) *Fit and Well. Changing Lives 2012 –2022*.
<http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/articles/improving.html>
Scottish Government (2002) *Partnership working Models and experiences of social partnerships in developed Europe*

Challenges of partnership working...

Competition between organisations: although some competition between organisations can be motivating, excessive competition can result in an unwillingness to cooperate.

Authority: it is important that all staff involved in partnership working have the necessary authority to take decisions. Lack of authority slows up decision making and frustrates progress.

Purpose: the broad ranging responsibilities of partner organisations can mean that the specific purpose of the partnership can be forgotten. Also partnerships can often be overtaken by events and lose sight of their main function.

Communication: it can be difficult to get the balance of communication right. Too many meetings can put partners off attending. Too little communication can result in duplication of effort, lack of understanding and mistrust amongst partners.

Funding: there is a danger that some organisations get involved in partnership simply to access funding or to meet statutory requirements.

Culture clash: when different organisations work together it can be difficult to adapt to each other's style of working. Each partner's expectations of partnership working may be different, which can lead to conflict when attempting to establish priorities and goals.

Time: For example, it takes time to develop trust between partners which can slow up the process of making decisions and using resources.

Building the Community Pharmacy Partnership

The Building the Community Pharmacy Partnership (BCPP) is a partnership between the Community Development and Health Network (CDHN) and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB). BCPP have developed a framework that, at its core, focuses on community development principles and partnership working to tackle locally identified health inequalities.

Success has been achieved through the commitment of a multi agency partnership that provides strategic direction for BCPP. This has been complemented by the development of locally instigated community pharmacy partnerships that have been resourced through CDHN.

The energy created through the utilisation and sharing of knowledge and skills from the medical and social partners has been key to the learning, commitment and development of this programme

CDHN has managed the BCPP Programme for over 10 years and funded over 500 projects.

