



Ontario

Echo: Improving Women's
Health in Ontario



STRATEGIC PLAN

2009-2011

ECHO'S STRATEGIC PLAN

VISION

Improved health and well-being
and reduced health inequities for Ontario women



STRATEGY 1

**Advancing
Knowledge**

Investing in
Community &
Policy-
Relevant
Research

STRATEGY 2

**Facilitating
Stewardship**

Supporting
Policy
Advancement

STRATEGY 3

**Strengthening
Community**

Synthesizing
& Translating
Knowledge

STRATEGY 4

**Being the
Focal Point**

Creating
Profile for
Women's
Health Needs
and Voices

MISSION

Greater health for women through leadership,
productive partnerships and research based action

VALUES

Equity. Diversity. Inclusiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Echo: Improving Women's Health in Ontario, an agency of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, is on a mission to improve the health and well-being of all Ontario women and to reduce health inequities.

Why a provincial agency focused on women's health?

Key to improving women's lives is a health system that recognizes and responds to women's unique health needs. There continues to be gaps in the understanding of women's care needs and how care must be different for men and women if equitable access and outcomes are to be achieved. Moreover, there has not been enough focus on ensuring that research findings are understood and useable by health system providers, policy makers and women themselves. There is a clear and recognized need to transform knowledge into action.

Echo was created to raise the profile of women's health needs, provide focus, and create the synergies needed to facilitate action.

ECHO'S MANDATE

Echo's mandate is to be the focal point and catalyst for women's health at the provincial level. Echo promotes equity and improved health for women by working in collaborative partnerships with the health system, communities, researchers and policy-makers.

To achieve this mandate, the agency is expected to:

- Conduct, fund and partner on policy-relevant research initiatives to fill knowledge gaps in women's health;
- Provide input to government policy, in collaboration with stakeholders, to improve the health status of women, reduce health inequities utilizing a population health framework and promote the provision of accessible, appropriate, effective and equitable care for women;

- Synthesize and translate women’s health knowledge into a variety of information tools and services;
- Act as a provincial advisor on women’s health to the Minister, the government and stakeholders; and
- Provide expert advice and recommendations in response to Minister and Government requests.

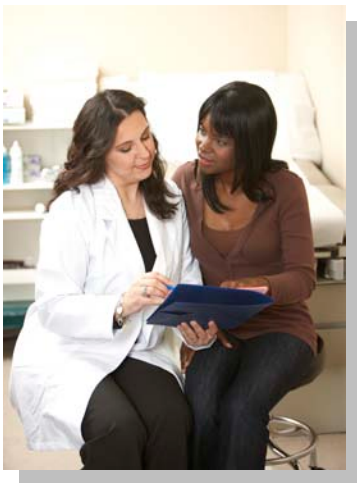
Following an extensive province-wide consultation by Diana Majury, an Associate Professor in the Department of Law at Carleton University, Echo was created in August 2007. Much has been undertaken by the agency since its establishment including the following highlights:

Organizational development:

Echo has successfully completed the significant effort of launching a new organization. The work of developing and implementing a staffing structure, establishing an office location and defining governance structures and processes has all been achieved.

Investing in:

- the POWER Study (Project for an Ontario Women’s Health Evidence-Based Report Card), a crucial study that is providing a baseline from which to measure and monitor progress in women’s health;
- a professional education program based on the recommendations of the *Achieving Best Practices in the Use of Hysterectomy* report;
- the Ontario Women’s Health Network to create a tool to support inclusion of marginalized women in system change processes;
- a mentoring program for Family Physicians on women’s mental health -issues related to violence with the Ontario College of Family Physicians; and
- an evaluation of the impact of a screening test that predicts preterm birth that will support transfer decisions for women in labour.



Partnering with:

- the Canadian Institute of Health Research's Institute of Gender and Health launching a knowledge translation initiative addressing women and depression in Ontario;
- key stakeholders to support the incorporation of equity strategies into the Local Health Integration Network's (LHIN's) Integrated Health Services Planning;
- community organizations and other key stakeholders to increase access to cancer-screening for marginalized women;
- The Institute for Clinical Evaluative sciences on the pending release of a study examining the current state of abortion access in Ontario; and
- The University of Ottawa, the University of Western Ontario, York University and the University of Toronto Chairs in women's health research regarding the development of a community of practice in women's health research.

Engaging with:

- community members and researchers to reflect women's voices and develop recommendations for the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care's 10-year Mental Health and Addictions Strategy;
- key stakeholders through the launch of a series of *Echo Conversations*, an initiative designed to connect with the community and inform Echo's projects;
- community members and researchers in leadership and capacity-building activities; and
- Expert partners who will assist with the development of evidence-based policy recommendations in regular releases called Echo Advances.

In addition to the above, Echo has been working diligently to develop and refine the skills and actions required to fulfill its mandate. What follows is the strategic plan that will guide Echo as it works to improve the health and well-being of women in Ontario.

ECHO'S STRATEGIC GOALS

Strategy	Mandate Alignment	Activities
Advancing Knowledge	Conduct, fund and partner on policy relevant research Initiatives	<p>Conducting research internally</p> <p>Surveillance of key women's health indicators</p> <p>Funding and partnering on policy relevant research including community based research</p>
Facilitating Stewardship	<p>Provide input to policy in collaboration with stakeholders</p> <p>Act as a provincial advisor and provide expert advice and recommendations to government and stakeholders</p>	<p>Advising on policy for the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care</p> <p>Promoting women centred services within LHINs</p> <p>Supporting the uptake of policy enhancements in health service agencies, community organizations, and LHINs</p>
Strengthening Community	Synthesize and translate women's health knowledge into a variety of information tools and services	<p>Developing evidence-based practice tools</p> <p>Providing stakeholder investment services and support</p>
Being the Focal Point	Being the focal point and catalyst for women's health at the provincial level	<p>Creating profile for women's health needs and voices</p> <p>Supporting the need for gender based analysis</p>

ECHO'S PRIORITIES FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

Echo defines women's health as follows:

- Women's health involves women's spiritual, emotional, cultural, and physical well-being, and is determined by the social, political, cultural and economic context of women's lives, as well as by biology.
- In defining women's health, we recognize the validity of women's life experiences, and women's own beliefs about, and experiences of, health.
- We believe that a woman should be provided with the opportunity to achieve, sustain and maintain health, as defined by the woman herself, to her full potential.

(Source: Women's Health Office McMaster University, 2000)

Working from our values and this core understanding of women's health, Echo defined its priorities. Echo has four areas of priority with specific targets outlined for each. Echo's strategy is designed to deliver improved health for Ontario women, support government priorities, and improve the capacity of the health system to meet women's needs.

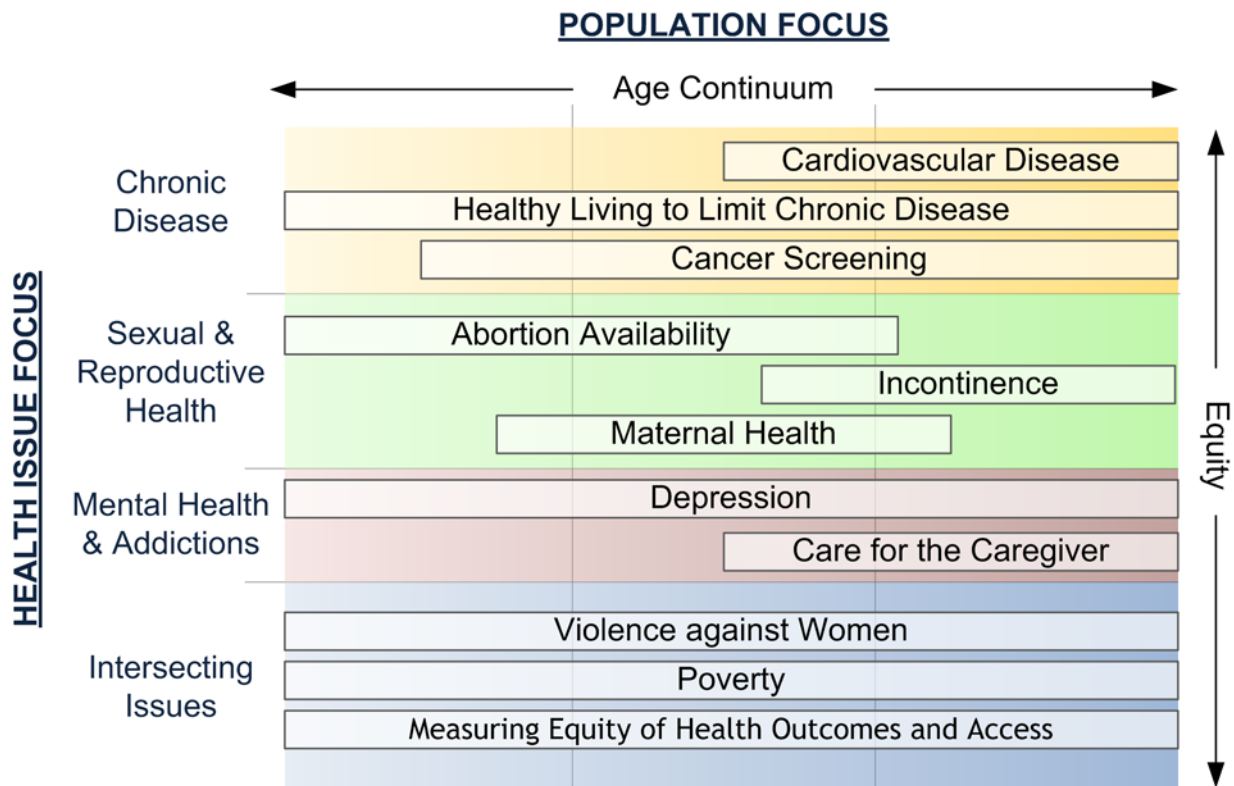


Echo's strategy will demonstrate traction in each of its priorities and targets using specific and measurable health indicators such as knowledge uptake, health outcomes like cancer screening rates, and knowledge creation such as knowing the availability of abortion services across the province, and access to information.

Echo has defined a particular long-range **focus on health issues affecting peri to post menopausal women**. The health issues affecting this age group are poorly understood and Echo feels that it can make a significant impact on women's lives, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of the health system as a whole by focusing on the needs of this cohort.

Echo will take a broad approach investigating and developing recommendations related to wellness concerns including incontinence, sleep disorder, cardiac issues and depression.

Echo’s priorities as defined through the cross province consultation carried out by Diana Majury are Chronic Disease, Sexual and Reproductive Health, as well as Mental Health & Addictions. Echo will also give consideration to three social determinate areas (Equity, violence and poverty) that have demonstrable impact on women’s health across all ages.



Echo will work to ensure that the intersection points that impact women’s health outcomes are also explored for example depression for women with chronic disease.

ECHO'S STAKEHOLDERS

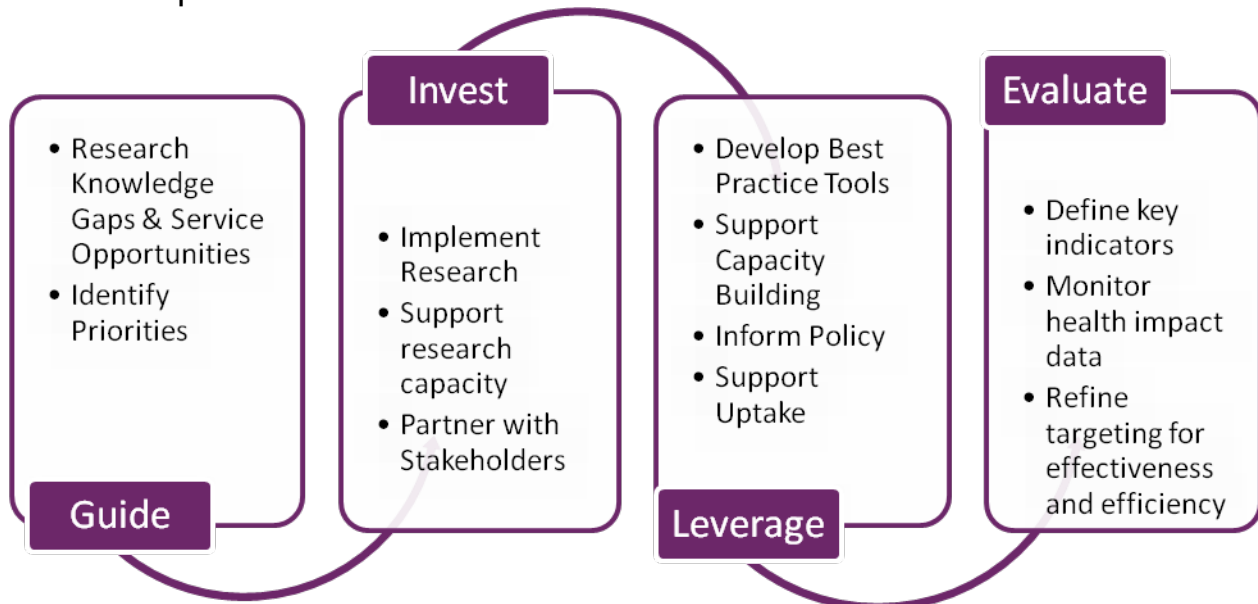
Echo has identified that it has a broad range of stakeholder interests to consider in doing its work. Key groups are identified here.



ECHO'S STRATEGY IN ACTION

The rationale for creating Echo is grounded in the uniqueness of women's health, equity and access needs. The value Echo will provide is to ensure that the considerable time and funding spent on women's health, equity and access issues will be understood and useable by stakeholders including health system providers, policy makers and the public.

As Ontario's health system continues to evolve, there is a critical need to mobilize and transfer existing knowledge to women and into care settings in ways that are related to a gender based analysis. Through various approaches to knowledge translation, Echo will create a broader understanding of the need for gender sensitive approaches to promote overall improvement of women's health in Ontario.



To accomplish the overarching goals of its mandate, Echo is:

- guiding investments and identifying priorities;
- investing in research, research capacity and partnering with key stakeholders;
- leveraging existing and developed knowledge, informing policy, supporting capacity building and uptake; and
- evaluating the outcomes to refine targeting for effectiveness and efficiency.

STRATEGY 1: ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE

INVESTING IN COMMUNITY AND POLICY RELEVANT RESEARCH

1. Guiding and Evaluating Echo's Core Business

Echo will guide its investments and identify priorities through a series of activities that focus on idea generation, finding knowledge and service gaps, and directing activities to address a core set of women's health indicators.

Echo will track the impact of its investments and activities through surveillance of women's health indicators, evaluation, and synthesizing health benefit data from Echo-funded projects.

2. Funding Research

Echo will invest in community and policy relevant research designed to address health and health system gaps toward advancing key health indicators.

Echo will support research capacity in women's health by transforming the Ontario Women's Health Council Research Chairs to Echo Chairs, linking Echo Research Chairs to Echo research activities, and linking other women's health research scholars to Echo's activities.

3. Partnering with Key Stakeholders on Research

Echo will collaborate in research partnerships to leverage capacity for generating knowledge, knowledge translation, demonstration projects and the spread of health care advancements.



STRATEGY 2: FACILITATING STEWARDSHIP

SUPPORTING POLICY ADVANCEMENTS

1. Advising on and Promoting Policy for the Government, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, LHINs, Others Ministries and Stakeholders

Echo will examine existing and new research for policy implications to support its advisory role. Echo will also influence the provincial strategies by reflecting women's views, ensuring involvement in planning, and providing targeted policy advice (e.g. 10-Year Mental Health Strategy). Echo will produce documents called *Echo Advances* that will offer policy advice.

2. Providing Input and Supporting the Uptake of Policy Enhancements Using a Population Health Framework with Health Service Agencies, Community Organizations, Regulatory Bodies and Others

Echo will examine existing and new research for policy implications through a gender lens and collaborate to develop mechanisms for adoption (e.g. best practice guidelines, demonstration projects, legislation).

3. Providing Expert Advice and Recommendations in response to Minister and Government Requests



Echo will respond to requests for advice and recommendations with research-informed information.

STRATEGY 3: STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY

SYNTHESIZING AND TRANSLATING KNOWLEDGE

1. Offer Tools to Enhance Provider Capacity

Echo will work to ensure the development of evidence-based practice tools (e.g. an equity toolkit), service and practice improvements (e.g. enhanced mechanisms for marginalized women to access cancer screening as a demonstration of action on inequities), program enhancements (by engaging existing successful evidence-based programs to support inclusion of gender-sensitive considerations), and knowledge translation and dissemination techniques.

2. Offer Services to Engage and Build Capacity of Stakeholders

Echo will invest in a series of activities to support relationship building, collaboration, knowledge exchange, information sharing and networking to increase the capacity of its stakeholders to be effective players in the Echo's core business and in the advancement of women's health. These activities include conferences, Echo Cafes (small group research discussions), leadership development opportunities and the provision of web-based information.



STRATEGY 4: BEING THE FOCAL POINT

CREATING PROFILE FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH NEEDS AND VOICES

Echo will be the organization that government, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, the health system and related stakeholder organizations, media and the women of Ontario seek out with their questions, ideas, options and support on issues of women's health, equity and access.

Echo will engage these stakeholders to create greater awareness of the need for gender based analysis in system planning.

Echo will:

1. develop and communicate a clear set of detailed measurable outcomes attached to each of Echo's priorities and targets and develop a plan of action geared to delivering demonstrable impact;
2. articulate, communicate and demonstrate the importance and value of those outcomes on the health of the women of Ontario and the priorities of government and partners;
3. leverage those results to educate and rally Echo's stakeholders on Ontario women's health, equity and access issues;
4. take a leading role in the health equity agenda with government, partners and other stakeholders. Echo's focus will be through a gender lens. Echo will proactively do a gender analysis of government priorities and initiatives;
5. create opportunities and mechanisms to gather women's perspectives on pressing health issues and needed solutions in order to ensure their voices are heard as part of health system improvement activities;
6. leverage the POWER study and other research to provide the expert advice to government, media, partners and the sector on Ontario women's health, equity and access issues;
7. act as a bridge between government and other stakeholders on women's health, equity and access issues;

8. provide the forums and opportunities to bring stakeholders together to focus partners and the sector on developing and/or affecting policy that impacts women's health, equity and access issues;
9. implement best practices to communicate Echo's achievements to government, legislators, and the public; and
10. leverage experiences in other jurisdictions on women's health needs.



IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

ECHO'S ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

Echo is a not-for-profit organization with a Board of Directors appointed by the Ontario Government. It is designated as an Operational Services Agency and is a public body under the *Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006*.

Echo's relationship with the Ontario government through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOH<C) and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU establishes the following accountability framework:

