

# An Extract Concerning A Strategy Of Systematic Provincial Investments In Innovation

From An Evaluation Of The Nova Scotia Government's  
Residential Services Community Based Options System  
(CBO) by Michael J. Kendrick PhD  
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For Further Details Please See The Complete Report Online At

Reference:

Kendrick, Michael J., An Independent Evaluation of the Nova Scotia  
Community Based Options Residential Service System, January, 2001  
[www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/publications/asp/product?=95](http://www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/publications/asp/product?=95)

It has been argued already that the rate of useful innovation within the CBO system is much below what it is ultimately capable of achieving. It has also been noted that the essence of the remedy rests not with indiscriminately spending more money. Rather, the key is to thoughtfully develop ways to encourage new ideas to be explored and attempted. In this regard, it will be the innovative aspect of people's character that most needs stimulation and encouragement. Innovations come through "innovation mindedness", and thus the essence of the challenge revolves around the way innovators are treated by the system.

The core strategies to achieve this have already been indicated by inference, but they bear repeating in the context of recommendations. The key is to see that innovation will require an ongoing investment in people and their ability to advance practice. By taking these past omissions, and inverting them into proactive strategies, they actually can serve as helpful guidelines for fostering innovation. At the risk of repetition they are used this way in what follows.

These types of people investments in programmatic innovation can be undertaken in a variety of obvious ways. First, there needs to be a distinguishable investment by the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services and the providers in updating the field as to what constitutes affordable innovative practice. Secondly, there needs to be the (carefully done) importation to Nova Scotia of people and examples of innovation for purposes of exposing people to interesting and useful "best practice".

Thirdly, the existing innovations and innovators in Nova Scotia should be recognized for their contributions. Fourth, there needs to be a systematic formal invitation, on a periodic basis, to the field to proceed with needed innovations. This can come from the Nova Scotia Department of Community

Services, but can be inclusive of other elements such as the non-government sector, advocates, experts etc. In essence, this would have the effect of being challenges or targets for needed innovation.

Fifth, there should be ongoing and systematic training/technical (“people-building”) assistance to encourage useful innovations including evaluation, dissemination of original ideas and examples from Nova Scotia and elsewhere, think tanks and other such stimulants associated with the unleashing of creativity. Some of this has been taken up by other recommendations. Sixth, there needs to be strategies of planned experimentation. It would be helped if this planning of experiments was not left to the Department, but could originate from any source that saw the potential to improve matters. In this sense, the request and mechanisms to establish innovative experiments ought to be routinized rather than being the exception that it is under current conditions.

Seventh, there should be ongoing meaningful analysis done with service users, their families, advocates and so on, as to what is lacking in the present system, and what would be more preferable. This would “anchor” the search for useful innovations in the experience of the people who rely on the system.

Eighth, many practical suggestions have been made repeatedly over many years to the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services of proven innovations which have ended up being routinely ignored. e.g. personalized support arrangements. Thus it may be useful to establish an entity external to the Department to give further credence to these sorts of proposals. If the Department itself is, at times, an obstacle to useful change, it would be worrisome to place all one’s faith in remedies solely under its control. At the same time, it would be unfair to scapegoat the Department for what is a more widespread slowdown in progress. Hence, an “across the board” mechanism to

promote needed innovations would be sensible.

Ninth, as indicated earlier, major initiatives are currently underway with no formal targets for innovation e.g. the Cole Harbour downsizing and replacement. This reveals what may be thought of as “lost opportunities”. Put in other words, there are undoubtedly many opportunities to innovate that are contained in what may seem to be ongoing operations of the Department and the providers. For this reason, it is useful for there to be a “building in” of innovation opportunities, even in what are thought of as routine practice and systems. This represents a strategy of “testing” of the present system for areas where the performance of the system can be improved.

It is enormously useful for there to be special opportunities for emerging innovation leaders to be given scholarships and stipends to study, even briefly, areas of practice in which the field is making progress. These potential leaders can be encouraged at a young age, and may include people other than staff such as service users, families, board members, civil servants, students and so forth. At present, this may even include some expanded ties to academia, change institutes, listserves, special networks and so forth.

Tenth, many persons promoted to key roles in the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services and in provider agencies in the last decade have had no history of prominent community service innovation, and few such persons have apparently been intentionally recruited. This almost assures that the system will drift towards stagnation. Nonetheless, it is entirely a reversible matter if the Department and the providers more consciously tackle the issue. It should be assumed that the people of Nova Scotia do not lack the talent or will to take matters into their hands and improve their system. What will be decisive is whether they get the opportunity to do this.