

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT & ANALYSIS FOR



The Ontario Stroke Network (OSN) has an important role to play in promoting excellent stroke care and vascular health while advocating for fewer strokes and better outcomes.

Communication plays a pivotal role in positioning the OSN as the 'voice' for the stroke prevention and care system in Ontario. Developing an effective communications and stakeholder relations strategy requires an open assessment of practices to date. Further, in order for the communications and stakeholder relations strategy to be on the mark, it's important that OSN gets feedback from those audiences it wishes to communicate to.

In just three years, OSN has taken important steps to successfully build relationships with regions and has launched a visual identity, a website and a regular newsletter. OSN currently is at a turning point. In order to ensure long term sustainability and impact, it is demonstrating its commitment to enhancing its communications effectiveness internally and externally, and to broadening its reach and stakeholder engagement. This is vital to OSN's vision and to its leadership of stroke care strategy in Ontario.

The communications audit process was formalized and key informants, focus group participants and best practice organizations were identified by a working group of OSN representatives.

Work undertaken to inform this report included:

- Document review/review of online presence
- Key informant interviews
- Focus groups
- Best practices review and analysis

This report provides details about the findings of the audit process.

OBSERVATIONS: KEY THEMES

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS	STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS
There is strong interest in and support for the work OSN is doing.	Stakeholders appreciate the intention of OSN and of its communications.
Corporate OSN communicates frequently with its closest stakeholders, the regional directors and coordinators.	Agreement among stakeholders is that the OSN story needs to be told more effectively and to a broader range of stakeholders. Robust web-based communications channels provide a forum for stakeholder dialogue and engagement.
There is a challenge in articulating OSN's mandate and objectives, particularly identifying OSN's unique position within the Ontario stroke health community.	General correspondence with the Ministry and LHINS is concise, clear and effective. There are different communications strengths and capacity among the regions surveyed. Given this, it is even more important to inform and coach the regions in advance of a broader communications effort. Communications should be tailored to OSN's key audiences.
Scan of media coverage shows OSN received cursory mention; and there is no mention of OSN's leadership in the provincial stroke care program.	OSN has been well-intentioned by using regions and other organizations as a conduit for communications although this approach does not effectively advance OSN's brand. In particular, media inquiries have been re-directed to other organizations. A centralized communications approach will strengthen brand awareness and confirm OSN's leadership. Communications plans that include media activities should be developed and implemented for priority OSN strategies such as the Stroke Report Card.
Time and again, the consultants heard that the resourcing of communications is an area that needs careful attention. Given that resources are limited, it's necessary for OSN to clearly identify the scope of communications work the organization is prepared to invest in on a consistent, ongoing basis.	Effective, on-going communications is central to stakeholder engagement. Affiliates, partner and similar organizations recognize this and have successfully integrated the communications function in their organizational structures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The communications and stakeholder relations strategy should reflect the implementation of OSN's strategic plan.
- Stakeholder engagement will be enhanced by a move from a blanket, generalized approach to a program of communications that is tailored to key audiences.
- The website should be more robust, with communications driving traffic.
- The member site should also be more robust, with visual identity developed to ensure users know they are on a members-only site.
- Further developing use of electronic media and of new media channels will extend outreach and engage particular stakeholder audience segments.
- Exploring potential opportunities for collaboration, for example to showcase innovations related to OSN-funded research, will extend OSN resources and advance its leadership.
- Develop and implement a communications coaching and mentoring program targeted at those spokespeople who will deliver stroke related messages at the local, regional and system levels.
- Produce more publicly-facing communication, using mainstream media as one conduit.
- Enhance the relevant relationship with MOHLTC.
- A separate communications plan for the release of the Stroke Report Card should be developed. This approach is also recommended to maximize opportunities to promote the OSN brand.