

Summary

There are key messages in the collaboration literature that are relevant for MH&A services in New Zealand.

1. There is widespread, international, cross-sector support for collaboration and partnerships to better respond to fragmented service delivery, complexity of need and community expectations.
2. The direction of collaborative change is towards community and place-based systems of support, detached from traditional settings. The direction of change is underpinned by equity and partnerships with citizens, and a dismantling of traditional hierarchies and professional boundaries.
3. An integrated system of support is more likely to develop when there are concurrent macro and micro approaches to collaboration and partnerships.
4. Collaborative approaches should be conscious, purposeful, goal-driven and highly contextual.
5. The proposed system change is challenging, and requires support and appropriate resourcing.
6. There are numerous opportunities and resources to support the development of collaborative capability.

Widespread support for collaborative capability

The literature on collaboration and partnerships is extensive and encompasses a broad range of settings and agenda. In general, the collaboration literature reflects a shift away from traditional transactional interactions based on state-mandated “doing to”, towards disseminated collaborative and integrated approaches based around “working with”, underpinned by the rights of citizens to determine the shape and outcomes of support and development.

Primary reasons given for the shift to more collaborative approaches are:

- the failure of fragmented systems to meet need
- the complexity of need and situation
- changing community and citizen expectations.

Increasing demand for services, the complexity of problems and individual or community need, community expectations, and an emphasis on rights-based citizenship, are all influencing the shape, nature and purpose of health and social services.

Long-term goals expressed in the literature focus on responding to demand through combined collective responsibility and capacity building in communities. In the context of health and social services, an emphasis on wellbeing is coupled with a more preventive approach, the development of opportunities for individual self-determination, and the development and expansion of place-based integrated health and social services.

The direction of collaborative change

The direction of collaborative change is away from traditional hierarchies, existing organisational structures and transactional approaches. Instead there is an emphasis on altering demand through the development of community-based resources and networks to support and empower citizens to have greater influence over their own health and wellbeing.

Citizen engagement is enhanced through:

- personalised support approaches
- increased system flexibility to support individual choice and control over funding and services
- co-design of service delivery and systems
- investment in existing networks and communities and increased fluidity of service delivery.

Place-based health shifts emphasis into communities in order to respond to the wider determinants of health and to utilise existing networks, resources and opportunities to determine and respond to demand in different ways. **Whānau Ora** employs all these strategies in ways that are specific, organic, purposeful and responsive. In general, there are gaps in the literature around how to build better relationships with people accessing services and there is significant opportunity to improve capability in this regard.

Macro and micro thinking

Collaboration is much more likely to be successful when there is a focus on macro and micro components of the system at the same time. It can legitimately be very challenging for individuals to work more collaboratively or for organisations to develop a collaborative culture, particularly where there is an absence of collaborative leadership and higher-level infrastructural change.

Similarly, there needs to be investment in community, local services, people accessing services, family and **whānau when collaboration is called for at a strategic level, in order that the reach of change is widespread.** This is particularly important for MH&A services. If the push for collaboration or integration takes place at a policy level, there has to be concurrent investment in local collaborative capability, development of leadership skills and understanding around the logistics of partnerships, and resourcing around time and space for innovation and collaboration.

Purposeful collaboration

There is often a tipping point that propels organisations (or services, teams and individuals) towards more collaborative behaviour. The tipping point can be around frustration with the current way of doing things, overwhelming demand or complexity, changes in policy direction or funding environments, or just a collective will to solve problems in partnership. However, organisations need to be clear about the opportunities and costs of collaboration before they enter into a partnership. There are risks for organisations around collaborating with minimal preparation or capacity, or collaborating for the sake of it. Both scenarios are more likely to lead to failed partnerships.

The literature is very clear that the shift towards collaboration and partnerships needs to be conscious, purposeful, goal-driven and very cognisant of context. Change, particularly transformative change, is difficult and requires comprehensive commitment from leaders that is developed over time. Success is often dependent upon the presence of enablers or brokers, people with a highly developed collaborative skill set who generate and support collective will and action towards a particular end point.

Purposeful collaboration builds on good relationships, understands the problem/challenge well, is centred around a shared vision, is resourced well (time, funding, skills), is clear about ways of working and relationship processes, uses binding mechanisms (such as agreements) and good quality evaluation to keep the partnership on track.

Collaborative capability

Collaborative capability is about values, behaviours and approaches of individuals as well as ways that people think and behave within an organisation. The literature emphasises the features of collaborative leadership, the critical skill sets of system translators or brokers, and organisational culture and infrastructure that supports collaboration and partnerships.

The capacity for people to network and collaborate within their own organisation or community (of people, practice, culture and place) is a crucial antecedent for collaborating more broadly. Collaborative values include humility, honesty and kindness, and a commitment to equity, trust and diversity.

Behaviours include openness to ideas, commitment to a range of partners, opportunities and ways of working, communal development of solutions, and an acceptance that solutions often lie outside traditional spheres of influence or organisational practice.

Approaches include the capacity to operate in a collective and multiplex environment, good human resource practice including clear roles and responsibilities, skill set identification and support, opportunities for innovation and risk, and good conflict resolution practices. Collaborative leadership and the use of brokers builds bridges between individual capability and collaborative organisational culture and system change. Collaborative leaders lead by example at the same time as allowing space and opportunity for innovation and collective action.

Where to start

The literature highlights two key interlinked starting points for any organisation that wants to collaborate more effectively. The first is to focus on internal organisational values, behaviours and culture, and to continuously reflect upon and develop the features that support collaboration. The second is to start with small networking or collaborative opportunities with other service providers or agencies, or through personalised approaches with people accessing services.

Beyond this it is crucial for organisations to develop collaborative skills, with small but developing opportunities to seek professional support for this in New Zealand. Human resource practice is critical to the development of collaborative capability through effective mentoring, shared learning opportunities, opportunities for role expansion, a focus on specific skills development (relationship building, communications, cross-sector capabilities, conflict resolution), leadership development, collaboration-focused performance management, and workforce planning and recruitment. Workforce development in the MH&A sector needs to implement strategies that foster a collaborative skill set.

Technical support for collaboration

The challenges around working more collaboratively are well documented in the literature. The biggest barriers to collaboration are inadequate resources (time, people and funding), poor leadership, an absence of vision or collective outcome, poor partnership processes (for example, around use of agreements, communications, conflict resolution, backbone support and evaluation), limited opportunity or mandate to innovate or explore divergent thinking, and poor or limited existing relationships and trust with prospective partners.

The technical resources available to support collaboration, new partnerships and reconfiguration of the existing system are expanding in scope as the mandate for collaboration evolves across sectors. There are a number of organisations that exist solely to support collaborative enterprise and expertise, and specific resources that assist with collaborative practice. Table 6 below outlines the main technical components of collaboration. All the resources used throughout this review are listed in a Resource Appendix at the end of this document.

Table 6: The technical components of collaboration

| Technical resource | Purpose |
|---------------------------|---|
| The partnership continuum | Describes the characteristics of different collaborative relationships |
| The partnership cycle | Describes the typical life-cycle stages of partnerships |
| Feasibility tools | Determine readiness for collaboration |
| Agreement resources | Provide examples and agreement evaluation tools |
| Partnership processes | Describe partnership success features |
| Evaluation tools | Assess internal and external partnership effectiveness |
| Moving on strategies | Supports staff turnover and the winding up and transition of partnerships |

Conclusion

The push for collaborative capability is an international objective in the developed and developing world, across public/private interfaces, and across a range of traditional organisational and service delivery boundaries. The literature on social sector collaboration borrows from business models, interfaces with sustainability goals, blurs boundaries between philanthropic, private and state objectives, deinstitutionalises across organisational layers, and invites innovation in order to create paradigm shifts and respond to complexity of need.

There are strong signals across the health and social services sector in New Zealand that collaborative capability is central to the development of fourth-wave integrated, community-based, and citizen-focused MH&A support options. There are many resources available to support the MH&A sector to develop collaborative capability: both individual workforce values, behaviours and approaches to collaboration, as well as structural and attitudinal changes at an organisational and system level.