

Enhancing Dementia Care: Harnessing the Project ECHO™ Community of Practice Approach

Promising Practices to Enable a Healthy Workforce to Provide Person-Centred Care in Long-Term Care

If you are looking for promising practices used in long-term care to foster healthy work environments to deliver safer, higher quality person-centred care, then this resource will be of interest to you.





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Schlegel Villages is comprised of 18 long-term care (LTC) facilities located throughout southern Ontario. Its aim is to provide holistic healthcare in a home environment, located within an internal neighbourhood design that promotes a caring community with emphasis on optimal health and life purpose for each resident.

Schlegel Villages adopted the use of the Project ECHO™ approach, a globally-recognized community of practice framework initially created in 2003.

This promising practice summary provides an overview of the community of practice developed to support the implementation and spread of the organization's Living in my Today (LIMT) dementia program. It was informed by an interview with the Innovation Specialist at Schlegel Villages.



Objective and purpose of the initiative

How the initiative improves person-centred care and enables a healthy workforce in long-term care

This promising practice aims to create internal knowledge-sharing networks – particularly related to dementia care – through multi-point video conferencing.

- This initiative utilizes a community of practice to support the implementation and spread of Schlegel Villages' LIMT dementia program.
- It creates a formal arena for team members to share their experiences and leverage their collective knowledge to better support residents living with dementia.
- It creates opportunities for team members to acquire new skills and knowledge, increasing their overall confidence.
- It provides didactic education training for team members.
- This initiative disseminates and implements best practices across various LTC homes.
- It helps to identify specific resident challenges and collectively develop recommendations to improve well-being outcomes for individuals living with dementia.

“We were interested in how to set up a community of practice so that all of our villages are able to learn from each other and learn together so that our implementation team isn't just dealing one-on-one with individual [LTC homes] [...] we really wanted our LTC homes to be able to share their experiences and leverage their collective knowledge.”

—Interview Participant

Approach

Main features of the initiative

- Seeking a more effective way to implement its LIMT dementia program, Schlegel Villages researched various community of practice frameworks.
- The Project ECHO™ framework was determined to be a suitable community of practice approach for use by Schlegel Villages. The framework was developed at the University of New Mexico and is a guided practice model that increases workforce capacity to provide best practice speciality care and reduce health disparities.¹
- The ECHO community of practice model follows a structured meeting format: each virtual session involves a 10-minute didactic education plenary followed by the presentation and group discussion of a case study related to a topic focused on Schlegel Villages' LIMT dementia program (e.g. show and tell: harnessing the power of cues; promoting inclusion: abilities focused engagement, etc.).

1. For more information about the Project ECHO approach, visit: <https://hsc.unm.edu/echo/>

Who was involved?

- Monthly virtual community of practice meetings are led by interdisciplinary, specialist ‘hubs’ (for example Schlegel Villages’ LIMT Implementation Team and external subject-matter experts) that join with participants or ‘spokes’ (such as team members from individual LTC homes) to share knowledge and best practices.
- Schlegel Villages’ LIMT Program Lead and Program Coordinator are primarily responsible for organizing and facilitating monthly Project ECHO meetings. Schlegel Villages’ Innovation Specialist led an evaluation of the Project ECHO community of practice.
- Each session, team members from an individual LTC home are responsible for preparing and presenting a case study related to the meeting topic, which typically aligns with one of the five key pillars of the LIMT program:
 - meaningful and active engagement
 - enjoyable mealtime experiences
 - empowered care partners
 - thoughtful design
 - supportive approaches to care
- Other team members participants are responsible for taking part in breakout rooms to formulate recommendations to address the issue which was identified in the case study presentation.

Implementation

Timeline

The project was first piloted in April 2022. Three Project ECHO sessions had been hosted, at the time of the interview.

Required skills, expertise and resources

- A key component of the Project ECHO approach is having subject matter experts who provide didactic presentations as well as implementation recommendations and considerations for highlighted challenges and issues.
- It was also noted that an individual with strong facilitation skills is critical to hosting effective meetings.
- Project ECHO sessions are hosted using Zoom virtual conferencing technology.

Barriers or challenges that may have hindered the implementation of this initiative

- No major implementation risks have been identified to date. However, Schlegel Villages has encountered reluctance from some LTC homes that have not volunteered to present a case study example. To address this issue, The ECHO Facilitator developed a template that can be easily and anonymously populated.

Key enablers to implementing the initiative

- Specialized training: prior to hosting its first session, three Schlegel Villages support office team members received Project ECHO training through the ECHO Ontario Superhub, a collaboration between the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and the University Health Network (UHN).

- Access to subject matter experts who participate in Project ECHO meetings, including research chairs from the Research Institute for Aging and world-renowned dementia experts.

Impact of the initiative

Indicators of success

- At the time of the interview, three Project ECHO sessions had been hosted by Schlegel Villages. Despite the sessions being voluntary, participation increased from three to seven LTC homes over the course of three months.
- Some of the LTC neighbourhoods that have presented case study examples have been successful in implementing recommendations received from subject -matter experts and other LTC teammembers who participated in the Project ECHO meetings.

How success is measured

- Evaluation of each Project ECHO session is conducted; formal evaluation is also a requirement to be recognized by the Ontario ECHO Superhub, a collaboration between CAMH and UHN which serves new projects.²
- At the end of each ECHO session, participants are asked to answer four questions:
 - Overall, did you enjoy the session?
 - Did you learn something new?
 - Are you able to apply what you learned?
 - Do you intend to apply what you learned?
- In addition, participants are asked to complete a post-session online survey that assesses learning and satisfaction. Feedback has been extremely positive with 100 percent of participants saying they would recommend the ECHO session to others.

Sustainability and scalability

Sustainability

- Schlegel Villages has intended to conduct a more fulsome analysis and reporting of collected evaluation data at the end of the pilot.
- Team members who oversee the Project ECHO program are beginning to develop a formal process for sharing key learnings from Project ECHO sessions across the entire organization.

Scalability

- In 2018, a “superhub” was established to support new ECHO projects throughout Ontario. Currently, 30 ECHO projects are available in practice areas such as autism, bariatric care, chronic pain, epilepsy, geriatric care, mental health, opioid use and pediatric care.
- The Ontario Superhub is one of 14 Project ECHO global training centres.³
 - Training is provided through “virtual immersion” events. Virtual immersion takes place using Zoom video conferencing. This two half-day virtual training program aims to provide in-depth, practical information about how to launch an ECHO and ensure high quality and fidelity to the model.

2. For information on the Ontario ECHO™ Superhub, visit: <https://www.echoontario.ca/#1>

3. Information related to the Ontario Superhub’s training initiatives can be accessed at: <https://www.echoontario.ca/Start-an-ECHO/How-to-Start-to-Start>

- Training topics include operations, implementation and best practices, spoke recruitment and retention, developing curricula, evaluation, information technology best practices and more.
- Immersion training is free for Ontario participants; training for ECHO projects out of-province is provided through a cost recovery model. ECHOs have been established in many provinces and territories coast to coast, including British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador.
- To date, the Superhub has supported the implementation of 33 ECHOs from 23 organizations across four countries.

Additional resources

- [Living In My Today | Schlegel Villages](#)