



Mood Disorders Society of Canada
Société pour **les troubles de l'humeur** du Canada

2024 – 2028 Strategic Plan

Mood Disorders Society of Canada

January 2024 – December 2028

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1. Executive Summary

Mood Disorders Society of Canada stands as a prominent leader in Canada's mental health landscape, renowned for our unwavering commitment to improving the lives of persons impacted by mental illness, and sustaining impactful partnerships across the public, private, and non-profit sectors that are dedicated to shaping a future where mental health is prioritized.

From October to December 2023, Mood Disorders Society of Canada engaged Laridae, a leading management consulting firm, to guide the Board of Directors and staff through a strategic planning process, leading to the adoption of a new strategic plan. Together, our approach to planning supported the Board of Directors throughout the process and provided oversight in developing the final strategy.

The process enabled the Board of Directors and senior leadership to reflect on the organization's current state and the environment in which it works. It also ensured that the voices of 423 individuals were engaged and heard through a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process that included staff, funders and donors, community partners, volunteers, and more.

In December 2023, the Board of Directors came together to give shape to the strategic path ahead through a two-part planning retreat.

Strategic Directions

To support our mission, achieve our goals, respond to the feedback we heard from our community, and address the internal and external considerations that shaped the planning process, our strategy is focused on the following four strategic pillars:

- **Diversify Fund Development**
- **Propelling our Communication Strategy**
- **Strengthen Team Resilience**
- **Achieving a Greater Impact, Together**

Mood Disorders Society of Canada is committing to a four-year strategic plan. As such, these directions are broad and oriented to the future—providing a clear focus and direction while enabling us to respond and adapt as circumstances evolve.

These directions will provide a strong framework for developing annual operational plans with measurable goals and realistic objectives for the organization to monitor our progress effectively.

2. Strategic Foundations

2.1. Mission

Collaboration is an MDSC operational principle. The Society fulfills its mandate through an active partnership approach that engages like-minded organizations in the public, private, non-profit, and voluntary sectors. The MDSC is engaged on an ongoing basis in a wide range of projects and initiatives designed to support the inclusion of persons with mental illnesses in Canadian society and has taken a lead proactive role in public policy and program development in many capacities on the national stage.

2.2. Vision

Mood Disorders Society of Canada has grown out of the vision and drive of a number of leaders with lived mental health experience from across Canada who in 1995 saw the need for a broad-based structure to bring Persons with Lived Experience (PWLE) together and who believe that PWLE have a key role to play with regard to education and advocacy at the national level. This vision continues today.

MDSC was formally launched and incorporated in 2001 with the overall objective of providing people with mood disorders with a strong, cohesive voice at the national level to improve access to treatment, inform research, and shape program development and government policies with the goal of improving the quality of life for people affected by mood disorders.

MDSC's overall objective is to provide people with mood disorders with a strong, cohesive voice at the national level by:

- Raising awareness that mood disorders are treatable medical issues and working towards eliminating barriers to full community participation in reducing discrimination and stigma, involving members of the public, government, and treatment/service providers.

- Building a national clearinghouse of information and resources related to mood disorders.
- Advocating for the creation of adequate and accessible stigma-free programs for Canadians living with or suffering from mental illness.
- Ensuring that the voices of PWLE and family members are accurately understood and communicated on issues of national importance by building on existing networks and alliances.

3. Guiding Principles

Grounding our strategic plan, we will proceed with two guiding principles.

These principles will be the common elements that interconnect our strategic directions through action and help us to navigate our evolving landscape. Together, they respond to the impacts of recent years and the ever-changing mental health sector. They will inform and influence decision-making, will drive action toward achieving our strategic directions and uphold our key commitments.

- **Precision in Progress: steering our course with a data-driven approach**
Recognizing the dynamic nature of mental health advocacy, we understand the importance of having accurate insights to navigate this landscape. By practicing a data-driven, evidence-based approach we ensure our initiatives are impactful and responsive. This will allow us to adapt strategies in real-time, address emerging challenges, and enhance the overall effectiveness of our programs and advocacy efforts.
- **Integrity in Collaboration: forging ethical partnerships for lasting impact**
MDSC is dedicated to establishing enduring and ethically aligned partnerships. We will carefully select like-minded partners across public, private, non-profit, and voluntary sectors that are rooted in integrity and inclusivity. Our commitment to “do no harm” forms the foundation of our collective dedication to the well-being of those we serve.

4. Strategic Directions

An effective strategic plan sets the foundation for a clear, focused future, uniting the organization under a common purpose and strategy.

Our strategic plan is shaped by strategic directions, which provide clear focus and direction while allowing us to respond and adapt as circumstances evolve over the coming years. Each of our strategic directions is accompanied by a corresponding set of tangible commitments that serve as actionable steps toward achieving this fundamental goal.

These strategic directions and commitments will form a strong framework which will guide our long-term vision and provide a strong foundation for developing annual operational plans. These plans will be tailored with measurable goals and achievable objectives.

4.1. Diversifying Fund Development

Financial resilience is more than just securing resources for the present; it means building a sturdy foundation capable of weathering uncertainties of the future. Through deliberate and forward-thinking strategies, our objective is not only to sustain our organization but also to thrive and make a lasting impact.

Exploring creative funding channels is a priority, MDSC is grounded in the belief that a diverse funding strategy is indispensable not only for ensuring the longevity of our

organization but also for enhancing the scope and effectiveness of our initiatives.

By pursuing new sources of funding, MDSC aims to strengthen its financial groundwork, empowering us to navigate challenges and seize opportunities.

Impact Statement:

By 2028, MDSC will have achieved operational sustainability and financial resilience through the implementation of diversified funding strategies and the active pursuit of innovative sources.

Key Commitments

*Over the next four years, we will **diversify fund development** by ...*

- **Researching, developing, and implementing various funding models:** we are dedicated to exploring and implementing funding models that go beyond traditional approaches, including cost-recovery and reimbursement initiatives. Our aim is to identify and capitalize on diverse opportunities, such as research grants, creative funding campaigns, expanding our sponsor base, initiating new programs, and implementing peer-support initiatives. Through these funding models, MDSC seeks to create a sustainable financial ecosystem that empowers us to meet our organizational goals.
- **Leveraging data for strategic partnerships:** we will leverage MDSC's data and expertise to strategically enhance our collaboration with the private sector. This involves proactively seeking out partners aligned with our mission and developing mutually beneficial relationships that not only contribute to our sustainability but also amplify the positive outcomes of our work.
- **Developing a comprehensive honorarium framework:** MDSC is committed to ensuring compensation practices that recognize the valuable contributions of our volunteers and staff, particularly those with lived experience. We will prioritize equitable compensation for

individuals recruited for advisory committee or projects receiving honorariums. This commitment reflects our dedication to developing a culture of appreciation and equity while reinforcing the unique value of lived experiences.

4.2. Propelling our Communication Strategy

We stand at the forefront of co-creating a more empathetic and knowledgeable community. By enhancing outreach and elevating our communication, MDSC will transcend traditional awareness efforts.

Our initiative embraces a multifaceted approach, proactively addressing stigmas and promoting understanding. Through education, empathy-building, and utilizing a variety of communication tools, we will foster a more compassionate community.

MDSC extends its commitment not only to destigmatizing mental illness but also to strengthen the organization's visibility and ensuring our mission resonates far and wide. By effectively communicating who we are and what we stand for, we aim to promote widespread awareness of MDSC's essential role in advocating for mental health.

Impact Statement

By 2028, MDSC aims to reshape public perceptions of mental illness and enhance our organizational visibility through a comprehensive communication strategy, reinforcing MDSC's vital role as a mental health advocate.

Key Commitments

*Over the next four years, we will focus on **enhancing our communication strategy** by ...*

- **Reinforcing MDSC’s identity through intentional communication:** by strategically utilizing traditional methods and digital platforms, we will ensure MDSC’s activities are broadly showcased. Sharing key messages and information, we seek to reduce any confusion surrounding MDSC’s mission, thereby communicating a clear and recognizable identity.
- **Elevating visibility, outreach, and engagement:** MDSC is dedicated to amplifying its presence, with a keen emphasis on continuing to enhance engagement, particularly among youth and other demographics. Through targeted efforts, we aim to deepen connections with these communities, ensuring their voices are heard. We will expand our reach and foster meaningful interactions, driving forward our mission of advocacy with inclusivity at its core.
- **Ongoing anti-stigma education:** we will continue to lead public awareness and educational initiatives, crafting clear and compelling anti-stigma content. We will expand partnerships with schools, workplaces, and community organizations to facilitate mental health awareness workshops and seminars.
- **Empower voices through collaboration:** MDSC prioritizes its collaborative partnerships with caregivers, researchers, private entities, and organizations to amplify diverse perspectives in mental health discourse. We will champion inclusive communication strategies and serve as a hub for connecting voices, enhancing our collective influence.

4.3. Strengthen Team Resilience

To enhance resilience, MDSC will implement initiatives aimed at fostering a supportive and empowering workplace. This includes prioritizing the holistic well-being and professional development of our team members through targeted efforts, encouraging open

communication channels, promoting collaboration, and reinforcing a culture of trust and inclusivity.

MDSC will continue to prioritize the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of our team members, thereby strengthening our organizational health and creating a workforce capable of navigating challenges and driving our mission forward.

By placing a strong emphasis on team well-being, we will ensure that our organization remains adaptive and effective.

Impact Statement

By 2028, MDSC will yield a resilient team and nurture a culture of continuous growth, ensuring longevity and sustained impact in advocacy.

Key Commitments

*Over the next four years, we will **build team strength and resilience** by ...*

- **Investing in ongoing staff training and skill development:** through tailored training initiatives, MDSC will provide opportunities for our team members to enhance their expertise and develop their skills. Regular feedback loops and key performance indicators will measure the effectiveness of these initiatives, reinforcing our culture of continuous learning within the organization. We will encourage knowledge sharing, mentorship, and collaboration among our team members to further facilitate their professional development.
- **Developing a robust succession and mentorship strategy:** we will continuously enhance our organizational capacity and cultivate a versatile team ready to navigate both challenges and opportunities as they arise. Grounded in a belief in individuals' potential across all levels of their career, we are committed to providing purposeful guidance and support.
- **Building a comprehensive strategy for workplace well-being:** MDSC placing a particular emphasis on addressing and preventing burn-out

(dissatisfaction and demotivation), brown-out (disengagement), and burnout in the workplace. Through intentional efforts that directly contribute to the mental and professional welfare of our staff, we will implement structures focused on enhancing work-life balance and stress management. MDSC ensures an environment free from any form of harassment or discrimination in the workplace. MDSC is committed to creating a resilient work environment that safeguards our employees, ensuring the sustained health and effectiveness of our team.

4.4. Achieving a Greater Impact, Together

In pursuit of our mission, we celebrate the diverse perspectives and experiences of our partners.

Driven by a commitment to fostering a collaborative network that is rooted in inclusivity and innovation, MDSC aims to build a thriving community of professionals. This community will leverage its strengths and expertise to advance our collective initiatives, build meaningful connections, and enact positive change across regions.

Through sustained collaborative and mutual support, we will forge resilient partnerships capable of addressing current needs and proactively responding to future opportunities and challenges in mental health advocacy and support.

Impact Statement

By 2028, MDSC anticipates a transformative community network, where collaborative efforts and strategic partnerships amplify each other's strengths.

Key Commitments

*Over the next four years, we will **foster greater impact by ...***

- **Cultivating a robust professional network:** as a key facilitator in this space, our aim is to foster robust connections among stakeholders. Through targeted opportunities aligned with our objectives, we seek to amplify our collective impact. By nurturing strong partnerships and collaborations, our goal is to drive successful advocacy initiatives, effecting meaningful change while leveraging the combined strengths of our network.
- **Balancing practical programs and advocacy for impact:** striking a balance between practical programming and advocacy, our commitment is to maintain equilibrium. We will respond to evolving needs while championing voices through intentional advocacy, seeking impact through a dynamic fusion of hands-on programs, real-time responsiveness, and wider systemic changes.
- **Data-informed decision-making:** utilizing data and insights to guide choices, MDSC is committed to ensuring that its actions, programs, and efforts are not only well-intentioned but also grounded in evidence-based practices.

5. Appendix: Stakeholder Engagement

5.1. Why Engage?

Leadership Through Genuine Engagement

Strategic plans that provide meaningful direction over their stated duration rely on an authentic engagement process that genuinely seeks input and allows those invested in an organization's success to provide ideas and feedback.

Properly conducted, stakeholder engagement is in no way an abdication or devolution of leadership.

It's the opposite.

Leaders who reach out to and seek the input of the people delivering or accessing services are far more likely to craft future strategic directions that will resonate with those they affect and those who must implement them.

The Multiple Purposes of Engagement



Listen

To listen to stakeholders by gathering input, ideas, and suggestions.



Include

To include stakeholders in the planning process, helping to generate buy-in.



Educate

To educate stakeholders about the great work you do.

5.2. Engagement Process

Engagement served as the foundation for the process, informing subsequent discussion, deliberation, and decision-making.

Laridae developed and facilitated the engagement process from October to November 2023. The process was designed to engage with and listen to Mood Disorder Society of Canada’s key stakeholders.

As a result of this engagement, our strategic plan is informed by experience, evidence, and the most broadly held perceptions of all those we serve.

Audiences

Primary stakeholders engaged through the process.

Users of MDSC services, resources, supports, or programs	Staff members, volunteers, and Board members	Family members, caregivers, and interested community members	Youth/students receiving support from MDSC
Employers using MDSC resources	Donors or funders	Community partners collaborating on a current or past project	Academic institutes, researchers, and health care providers

Stakeholder Participation

 <p>Online Survey 407 Participants</p>	 <p>Focus Groups 9 Participants</p>	 <p>Key person interviews 4 participants</p>
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5.3. Common Themes

The following themes capture some of the common sentiments we heard during the stakeholder engagement process.

Ethos of Collaboration

Responsive collaboration:

- MDSC is recognized for its responsiveness in collaborations. Stakeholders note that the organization is agile, adapting to feedback, ensuring that collaborative initiatives remain effective and relevant.
- MDSC goes beyond project-specific collaborations; stakeholders often highlight the organization's commitment to building enduring relationships, creating a sense of partnership and trust.

Relationship-building:

- Stakeholders consistently describe MDSC as dedicated to "building bridges and relationships."
- The organization is portrayed as a "collaborative connector," adept at bringing diverse groups and stakeholders together.

Networking proficiency:

- MDSC is recognized for its proficiency in networking, securing funding, and establishing valuable connections.
- Underscores MDSC's overall stability and ability to navigate partnerships effectively.
- The National Executive Director's leadership is highlighted for its strong political and social connections, adding a layer of influence.

Inclusivity and Lived-Experience Focused

Authentic communication:

- MDSC's commitment to operating from a lived-experience lens is a cornerstone of its authenticity. Stakeholders consistently highlight the genuine, authentic, and relatable nature of the organization.

Relatability and trust:

- Stakeholders express a sense of trust in MDSC due to its lived-experience-focused approach, resonating with the real experiences of individuals with mood disorders.
- This trust is a critical factor in maintaining strong relationships with stakeholders and the wider community.

Compassionate commitment:

- The organization's commitment to addressing issues from a position of understanding and compassion is a key strength.
- Stakeholders value MDSC's empathetic approach, viewing it as essential in driving meaningful change. This compassionate commitment is seen as a driving force behind the organization's impactful programming and advocacy efforts.

Supportive Team Culture

Team cohesion:

- Staff members consistently express a strong sense of unity and cohesion within the MDSC team.
- The supportive culture fosters a feeling of belonging and shared purpose, contributing to a collaborative work environment.
- Highlight a sense of openness and honesty, creating a transparent and communicative team dynamic.

Culture of inclusivity:

- Stakeholders and staff alike appreciate MDSC's commitment to inclusivity, where everyone feels valued and included.
- The organization's inclusive approach extends beyond rhetoric, creating a workplace where diverse perspectives are actively sought and respected.

Positive leadership approach:

- Stakeholders often highlight the leadership approach within MDSC, acknowledging the effectiveness of the organization's leaders in creating a positive ripple effect throughout the organization.
- Dave Gallson, the National Executive Directors leadership style is perceived as clear, decisive, and supportive, creating a positive ripple effect throughout the organization.

Sense of purpose:

- Both staff and stakeholders feel a strong sense of purpose in their work supporting MDSC.
- The organization's mission-driven focus resonates, instilling a shared commitment to making a meaningful impact in the field of mental health.

Systemic Issues

Limited resources trend:

- MDSC confronts the prevailing challenge of reduced investment in community mental health organizations.
- Despite increased attention to mental health, organizations like MDSC's grapple with constrained budgets, impacting their ability to scale initiatives.

Resource disparities:

- A significant dichotomy exists—heightened focus on mental health coexists with limited resources and support for organizations like MDSC.
- This creates a challenging environment, necessitating strategic solutions to bridge the resource gap.

Clarity on basics of mood disorders:

- Addressing gaps in understanding mental illness and mental health is crucial, particularly in clarifying the basics of mood disorders.
- MDSC recognizes the need for widespread education to dispel misconceptions and enhance awareness around mental illness and in particular, mood disorders.

Volunteer Engagement

Impact on in-person event participation:

- Stakeholders express concern about the decline in volunteer engagement impacting in-person community events.
- The reduced willingness of individuals to participate in social events not only affects the overall success of initiatives but also diminishes the community-building aspect of these events.

Strain on initiatives:

- The burnout leading to reduced volunteer engagement is noted as a significant challenge, especially in executing and scaling MDSC's initiatives.
- Strain on resources and engagement can potentially hinder the organization's ability to effectively carry out its mission and reach its goals.

Public Awareness

Limited public awareness:

- Stakeholders express a strong desire for MDSC to enhance its public awareness initiatives.
- There is a consensus that while the organization is highly regarded among those already familiar, there is room for improvement in reaching a broader audience.

Misconception impacting perception:

- Stakeholders noted the tendency for individuals to perceive MDSC as program providers with a hands-on approach, sometimes overshadowing a clear understanding of the organization's focus on advocacy, awareness, and collaboration in mental health.

Potential impact on collaboration:

- External misconceptions about MDSC's role may narrow potential partnerships and collaborations, emphasizing the importance of addressing these challenges for the organization's growth and influence.

National and provincial visibility:

- There is a need to overcome the hurdle of limited visibility, both nationally and in major provinces. This challenge is multifaceted, encompassing the need for broader public awareness.
- Stakeholders emphasize the importance of MDSC being recognized not only by the public but also by policymakers and provincial governments.
- MDSC recognizes the importance of being visible and providing communications, knowledge, and resources in both official languages.

Resource Limitations

Staff burnout:

- Stakeholders voice a paramount concern regarding the potential impact of resource limitations on the well-being of MDSC's dedicated team.
- The relatively small size of the team raises concerns about staff burnout.

Workload distribution:

- Stakeholders raised concerns surrounding workload distribution, underscoring the significance of role clarity and clearly defined responsibilities. There was some apprehension regarding the possibility of staff members experiencing burnout.
- Ensuring a balance in the workload is crucial for sustaining a healthy and effective organizational culture.

Capacity Building and Resource Investment

Enhancing volunteer engagement:

- Implement targeted strategies to reinvigorate and motivate volunteers.
- Foster a supportive and sustainable volunteer community through clear communication and acknowledgment of contributions.

Staff training and development:

- Stakeholders recommend allocating resources for ongoing staff training and skills development programs.
- Enhance organizational effectiveness through continuous improvement of staff capabilities.

Proactive burnout measures:

- Stakeholders recognize the potential for burnout among staff and propose implementing proactive measures, including the possibility of

increasing the number of staff members to distribute work more evenly.

Strengthen internal infrastructure:

- Specifically, IT support to address internal need for enhanced team functionality.

Increasing Public Visibility

Explore strategic partnerships:

- To achieve the desired visibility, stakeholders emphasized the importance of facilitating educational initiatives.
- Stakeholders recommend partnering with academic institutions, schools, universities, doctor's offices, and workplaces to engage diverse audiences and destigmatize mental illness.

Communicating success stories:

- Stakeholders express a desire for more success stories highlighting positive outcomes of MDSC's initiatives.
- These stories should emphasize the real-world impact MDSC has on individuals' lives, showcasing tangible results.

Diverse stakeholder involvement:

- Stakeholders encourage MDSC to continue broad engagement across diverse sectors, from grassroots organizations to governmental bodies, to enhance visibility of partnerships and capitalize on MDSC's strength as a facilitator and partner.

Strategic Positioning for Impact

Embrace being a leader:

- Focus on being a leader in mental health awareness, particularly in schools, universities, and workplaces.

Strengthen influence:

- Increase influence and credibility in major provinces, prioritize engagement with: Alberta, Ontario, BC, Quebec.
- Foster relationships with key stakeholders in these regions.

Data-driven agility:

- Embrace a data-driven decision-making model to ensure that MDSC remains agile and responsive in navigating the dynamic landscape of mental health.
- Foster innovation and maximizing the impact of initiatives, by basing decisions on meaningful insights.
- Build and maintain strong relationships with Research Chairs and Universities in Canada and Internationally.
- Ensure MDSC stays aware of cultural trends globally and shares our own views and insights.