

Building Engagement-Capable Environments for Health System Transformation: An Implementation Study



Phase 1 Data Collection Report: Elgin OHT

August 2026

This report highlights findings from the first phase of the Build ECEs Study - a multi-year implementation study to learn about Ontario Health Teams' experiences building engagement capable environments for people-centred health systems.

The study aims to evaluate the implementation and early impacts of the Creating Engagement Capable (EC) OHTs framework, co-developed in 2023 by researchers, OHT representatives and Ministry of Health personnel. Since April 2024, OHTs have been required to adopt and implement the Framework, working towards a level 2 maturity rating (with the requirement to meet Level 2 by March 2027).

The information provided in this report covers the time period before and after the Framework was implemented (prior to September 2024 and up to Fall 2025) and includes specific learnings for your OHT.

How to use this report:

The report includes *Report Highlights*, *Study Methods and Detailed Findings* (Sections 1 & 2), and *Summary of Progress, Recommendations and Next Steps* (Section 3) to meet the needs of different audiences.

Report Highlights: Provides a high level overview of OHT-specific findings and a summary of next steps

Study Methods and Detailed Findings: Provides an overview of the study methods and results for your OHT, your OH region, and all OHTs to allow for in-depth understanding and comparisons

Summary of Progress, Key Recommendations and Next Steps: Summarize your OHT's progress (up to Fall 2025) with next step recommendations to improve in selected areas drawing on examples from other OHTs

This study is led by Dr. Julia Abelson and the Public and Patient Engagement Collaborative (PPEC) at McMaster University through a study funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). The study team includes researchers from across Canada and an advisory group of OHT representatives including Executive Leads, Engagement staff and PFC partners. The OHT advisory group that provided detailed input on the design and content of this report. For more information, visit the [Study Website](https://ppe.mcmaster.ca/engagement-capable-environments-health-system-transformation/) (https://ppe.mcmaster.ca/engagement-capable-environments-health-system-transformation/) or contact us by e-mail (ppec@mcmaster.ca).

Report Highlights

This report highlights the results from the first phase of the Build ECEs project, a research study focused on understanding the implementation of the Engagement Capable (EC) Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) Framework. Results cover the time period before and after implementation of the EC OHTs Framework (September 2024 to Fall 2025).

This customized summary focuses on results for Elgin OHT.
In the full report, results are shared for three groups:



Data used to compile this report include:



Paired surveys & interviews with Executive leads, engagement staff and lead PFC partners



Publicly available information posted to OHT websites, Ministry and Ontario Health websites



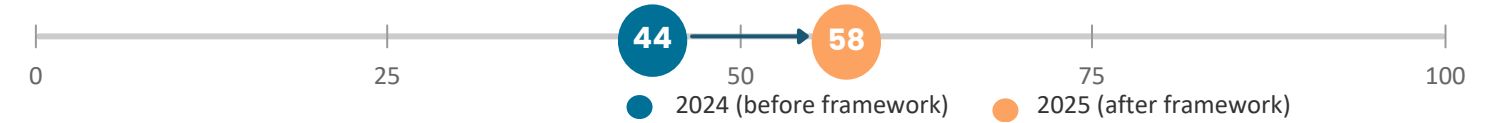
Administrative data available to the PPEC through our support partner role including Community of Practice (CoP) participation data and self-assessment data

Key findings

Self-reported engagement capability

To gain initial insights about OHT capability for PFC engagement and partnership, survey respondents were asked to rate their OHT’s level of engagement capability from 0 (low) - 100 (high) before and after Framework implementation.

Presented below is the median response (*middle number when all responses are ordered from lowest to highest*) for [OHT NAME] in 2024 and 2025. This shows a perceived increase in capability over time (see OHT-specific information compared to median responses for all OHTs at both time points in full report).



Engagement capabilities: Digging deeper

To complement self-reported engagement capability ratings, we looked at how OHTs are progressing with the key structures and enablers outlined in the EC OHTs Framework. Progress for each category, across each OHT, was rated as ‘low’, ‘medium’ or ‘high’ (see full report for details about each level). Results for Elgin OHT are presented below (see full report for additional information for all OHTs and OHTs in the West region).

Framework element	Category	2024 (before)	2025 (after)
Policies & strategies	Engagement strategy	Medium	Medium
	Compensation strategy	Medium	Medium
Structures & processes	Governance	High	High
	Engagement across OHT	Medium	Medium
Capacity	Staff support	Medium	Medium
	PFC partner capacity	Low	Low
Learning, development & exchange	Mentorship	Medium	Medium
	Evaluation	Low	Low
	Exchange activities	Medium	High
	Learning	N/A	Medium

Recommendations and next steps

Highlighted below are the three priority next steps for Elgin OHT based on the above analysis. A more detailed list of suggested next steps with examples from OHTs that have progressed further in specific areas are provided at the end of the report.

1 Consider how to increase the number of patients, families and caregivers partnering with the OHT to increase capacity

Category: Capacity

Current level: **Low**

Consider additional strategies to increase the number of PFC partners working with the OHT to ensure existing partners are not overburdened, and to ensure a diverse range of perspectives are included. Collaborating with partner organizations and conducting additional recruitment can help with this process.

2 Move forward with the evaluation of PFC engagement and partnership activities

Category: Learning, development & exchange

Current level: **Low**

Develop an evaluation plan that outlines the staff support for evaluation and an overall approach to evaluation (process and impact), building on existing evaluation tools and supports

3 Continue to build a formal mentorship program for PFC partners

Category: Learning, development & exchange

Current level: **Medium**

Consider pairing new PFC partners with experienced PFC partners to help them learn what to expect within the OHT, to answer questions and to help them feel comfortable with ; pairing process can be embedded into onboarding procedures

For more information about the Build ECEs study please visit our [website](#) or contact us by [e-mail](#).

Citation: Public and Patient Engagement Collaborative. Building Engagement-Capable Environments for Health System Transformation: An Implementation Study; Phase 1 Data Collection Report. Hamilton, Canada: McMaster University, August 2026.

Section 1: Brief overview of study methods

Overall Approach

The first round of data collection began in September 2025 with the aim of understanding:

- OHTs' self-reported engagement capability prior to implementation of the EC OHTs Framework (before September 2024) and after one year of implementation (September 2025)
- OHTs' experiences implementing the Framework, related challenges and supports, and the early impacts of implementation

Recruitment & Data collection



Paired surveys & interviews

Executive leads, engagement leads (or equivalent) and lead patient family caregiver (PFC) partners from each OHT were invited to participate in a survey and follow-up interview in Fall 2025.

- **124 individuals** from 56 / 58 OHTs participated (1 - 4 individuals per OHT)
- Approx. 70% response rate per group (Executive lead, Engagement lead, PFC partner)



Administrative data

Administrative data available to the Public and Patient Engagement Collaborative (PPEC) through our support partner role was used to provide additional insights (e.g., self-assessment and CoP participation data).



Publicly available data

Publicly available data was used to support the analysis such as information and documents posted on OHT, Ontario Health and Ministry of Health websites or shared directly by these parties.

Section 2: High-level findings

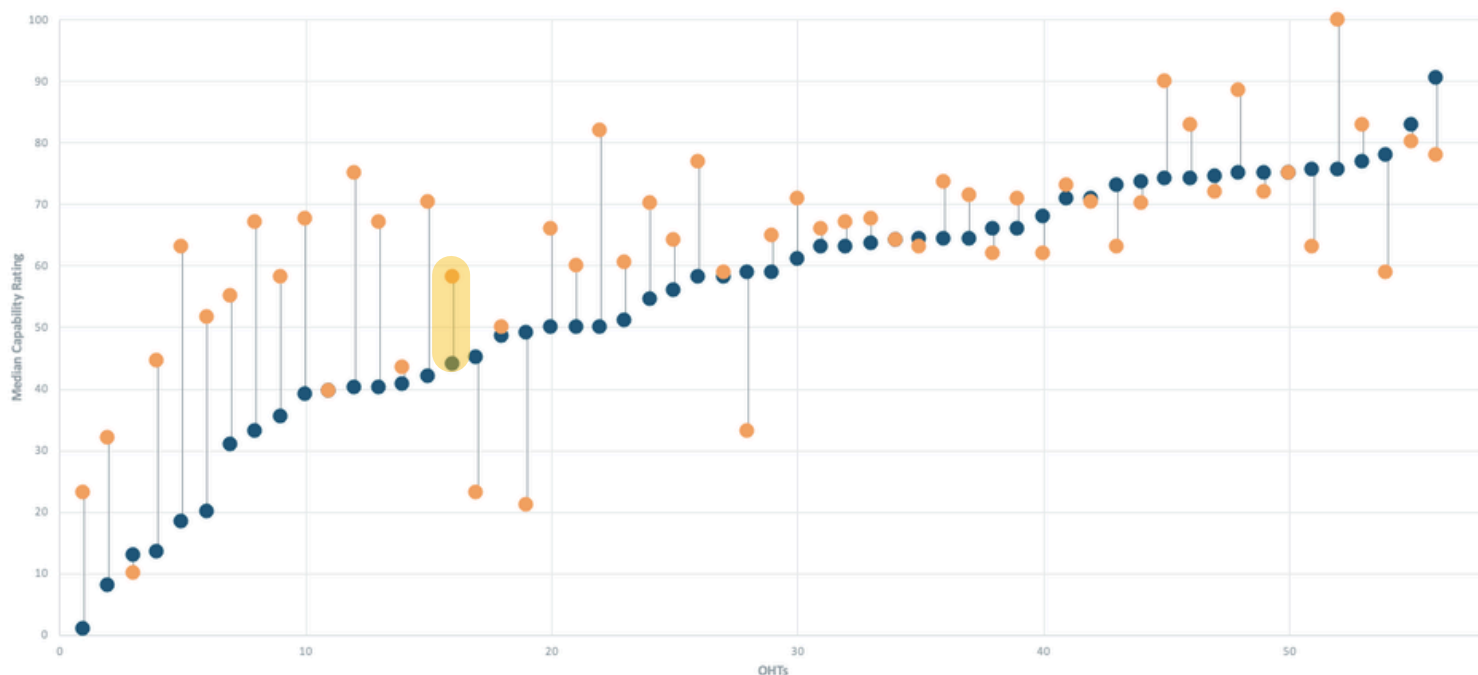
All findings focus on data from one or more data sources (e.g., surveys, interviews). Findings shared below are for your OHT, your region (West) and for the 56 OHTs (combined) who participated in the study. As a reminder, these findings are based on data collected in Fall 2025. Additional progress may have been made within OHTs since that time which will be captured in future data collection activities.

Self-reported engagement capability

Survey respondents assessed their OHT's engagement capability on a scale of 0 - 100 before (blue) and after (orange) they implemented the Engagement Capable OHTs framework. Median capability ratings (*the middle number when all responses are ordered from smallest to largest*) for each OHT (pre- and post-implementation) are graphed below.

Findings reveal different OHT groupings: those that started with lower capability ratings (bottom left) and reported increases; those that were moderately high and saw smaller increases or stayed consistent (middle), and those that rated themselves as highly capable and remained so (top right). Some OHTs reported a drop in capability ratings from 2024 to 2025 for various reasons.

Median capability ratings by OHT (2024 vs 2025)



The Elgin OHT data are highlighted in yellow in the graph above. The median rating for 2024 was 44 (range: 34 - 60) and for 2025 was 58 (range: 33 - 65).

Gaining a Deeper Understanding of Engagement Capabilities

All data sources were comprehensively reviewed to understand how OHTs are progressing with the four structures and enablers in the EC OHTs Framework (see outer ring of visual). These ratings were informed by the Framework but do not include all elements. Therefore, a ‘medium’ rating should not be interpreted as indicating that an OHT has reached Level 2 maturity. In the sections below, we summarize the progress made in each of these areas, first for Elgin OHT, then for the OH West Region, then for all OHTs (combined).



Policies & Strategies

This Framework element focuses on OHTs’ policies and strategies for engagement - specifically approaches to engagement and PFC partner compensation. Both of these sub-elements are explored below, along with details about what a low, medium and high rated OHT would look like.

Approaches to engagement refers to both having an engagement strategy in place and taking a thoughtful, comprehensive approach to engagement.

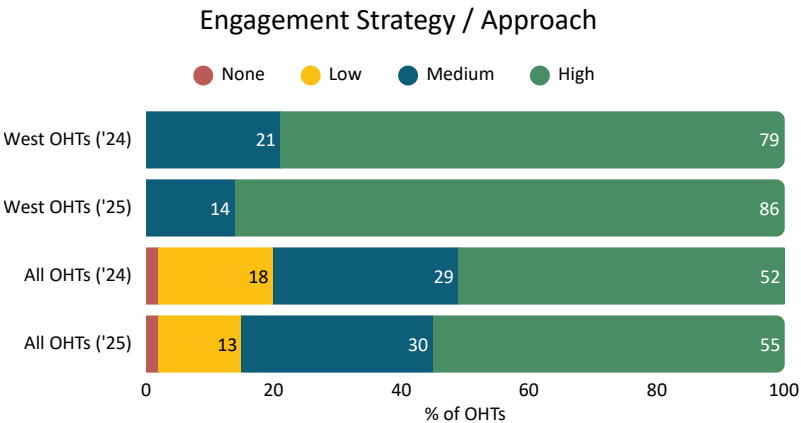
Low	Medium	High
Engagement strategy is under development. The approach, to date, does not explicitly address equity and inclusive practices.	Engagement strategy is implemented and includes <u>some</u> consideration of equity and inclusive practices including specific policies to support engagement	Engagement strategy is in place, is regularly reviewed and refreshed as needed. It includes policies and procedures to support engagement and outlines clear roles for OHT staff and PFC partners. Careful attention is given to equity considerations, including recruitment approaches that consider diversity in different ways and the creation of safe and inclusive spaces for PFC partner contributions.

Elgin OHT performed at a **medium** level at both time points. An engagement strategy is in place however it requires updating. An EDI perspective is included in the strategy. This level of achievement is lower than majority of OHTs in the West Region.

Comparison summary

West Region OHTs performed better, overall, than all OHTs combined, with most OHTs performing at the high level.

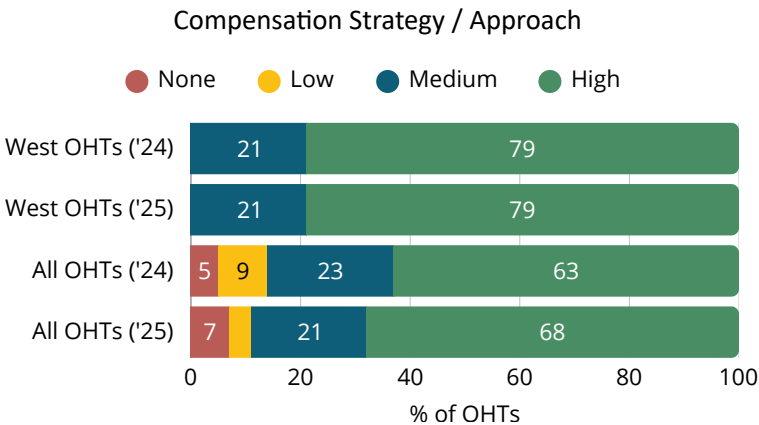
Just over half of **all OHTs** were performing at a high level at both time points with only a very small number having no engagement strategy or approach in place.



Approaches to compensation for PFC partners addresses the strategies and approaches that OHTs’ take to offer payment to PFC partners in recognition of their time and expertise. This does not take the place of covering expenses.

Low	Medium	High
Compensation strategy is under development; compensation is not currently offered.	Compensation strategy is in place and compensation is offered to at least <u>some</u> PFC partners.	Compensation strategy is in place and compensation is offered to all PFC partners. The strategy was actively developed and reviewed with PFC partner input. Equity considerations played a role in the development of the strategy.

Elgin OHT performed at a **medium** level at both time points. Compensation for PFC partners is provided, however a formal policy is in progress. This level of achievement is lower than majority of OHTs in the West Region.



Comparison summary

All **West Region OHTs** were at a medium or high level at both time points, higher than what was seen across all OHTs.

Across **all OHTs**, most had reached the medium or high level, but some OHTs have not started work in this area, and this increased slightly from 2024 to 2025.

Structures & Processes

This Framework element focuses on OHTs’ **inclusion of PFC partners in governance** and **how PFC partners are engaged across the OHT**.

Inclusion of PFC partners in governance refers to how OHTs have embedded PFC partners in governance committees and the roles they take on.

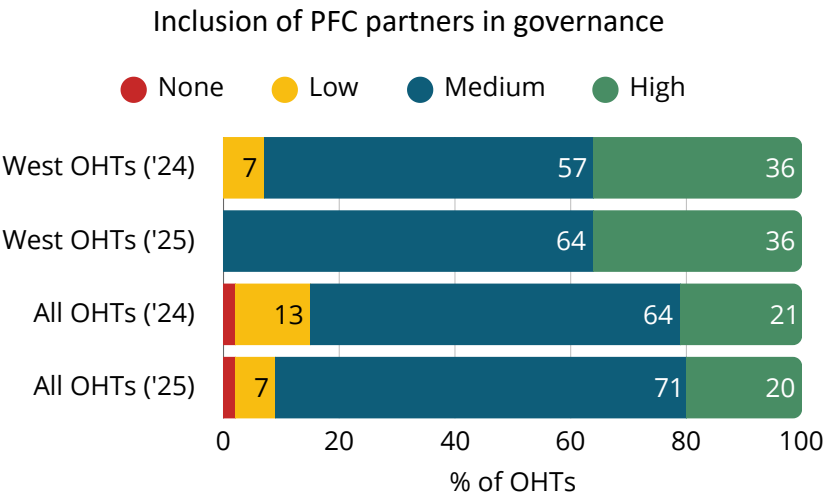
Low	Medium	High
Plans are underway to engage PFC partners in the governance of the OHT; this could include considerations of how to create space at governance tables or being in the process of recruiting PFC partners to fill governance spots	PFC partners are part of the governance structure, they may or may not have a voting role.	PFC partners are leaders of the governance of the OHT (e.g., in a chair role on the governance committee) and are viewed as equal members at the governance table.

Elgin OHT performed at a **high** level at both time points. Multiple PFC partners are engaged at the governance level, with one PFC partner being the co-chair of the coordinating council. This level of achievement is higher than majority of the OHTs in the West Region.

Comparison summary

In the **West Region**, all OHTs are performing at the medium / high level as of 2025, with more OHTs at the ‘high’ level compared to the rest of the province.

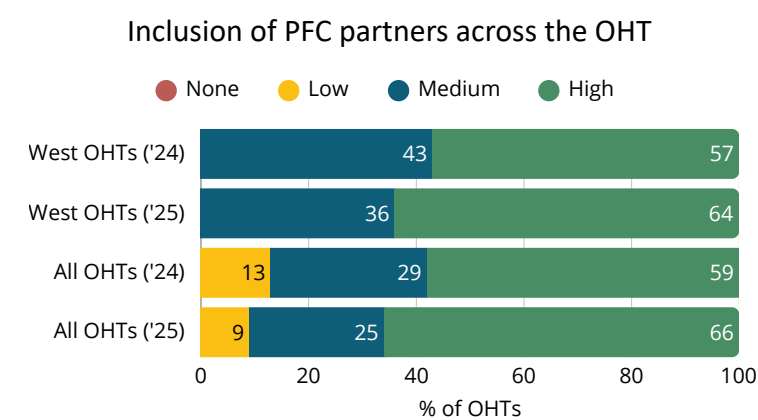
The majority of **OHTs** are performing at a medium level at both time points. A small percentage have not started work in this area or are at a low level, meaning PFC partners are not yet included in governance in these OHTs.



PFC engagement across the OHT focuses on how comprehensively PFC partners are engaged across all OHT work.

Low	Medium	High
There is limited inclusion of PFC partners within the OHT (only within a PFAC or similar structure) with a lack of clear goals and operational plans	PFC partners are included more broadly in the work of the OHT, beyond the PFAC, with some goals and operational plans.	OHTs performing at a high level have PFC partners as central players in the OHT’s work. PFC partners are included in most working groups and committees and clear goals and operational plans are in place for engagement.

At both time points, the **Elgin OHT** was at the **medium** level, with PFC partners being engaged in some, but not all, committees across the OHT. Over half of OHTs in the West Region (64%) were at the high level at the 2025 time point.



Comparison summary

All OHTs in the **West Region** were performing at the medium or high levels at both time points.

Across **all OHTs**, most were at the high or medium levels. A small proportion of OHTs were at the low level, needing to put greater emphasis on engaging PFC partners more fully within the OHT.

Capacity

This Framework element focuses on **staff and PFC partner capacity** to support engagement within the OHT.

Staff support for engagement refers to the ways an OHT provides dedicated staff capacity to support engagement work. This may include an engagement lead or multiple staff members who contribute to engagement activities in different ways.

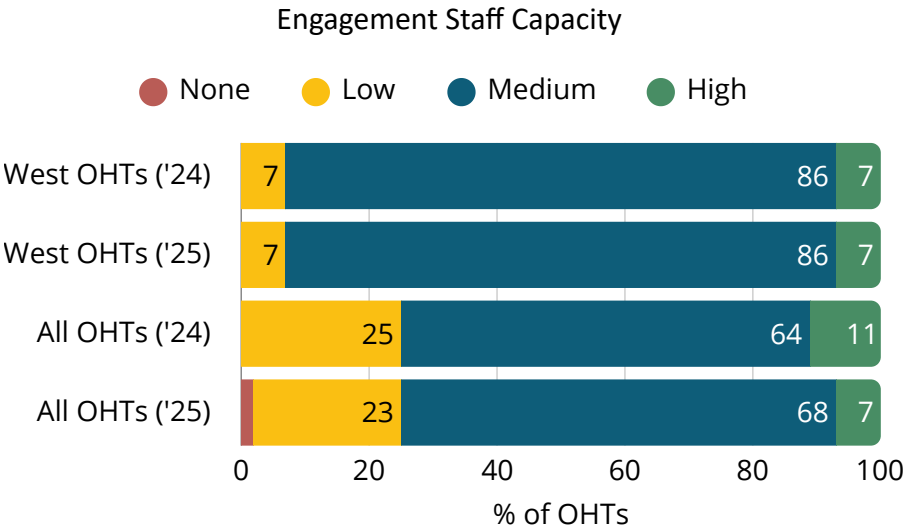
Low	Medium	High
Staff members / others work on engagement informally (off the side of their desks)	Engagement is a key component of an individual / group of individuals role(s), but not at a 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE).	The total time spent on supporting engagement (across one person or multiple roles) is at least 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE).

At both time points the **Elgin OHT** was at a **medium** level. Engagement is a component of a staff member’s role, but not in a full time capacity. This level of achievement is similar to majority of OHTs in the West Region.

Comparison summary

Most OHTs in the **West region** are at the medium level, with no change seen over time. A small percentage are at both the low and high levels.

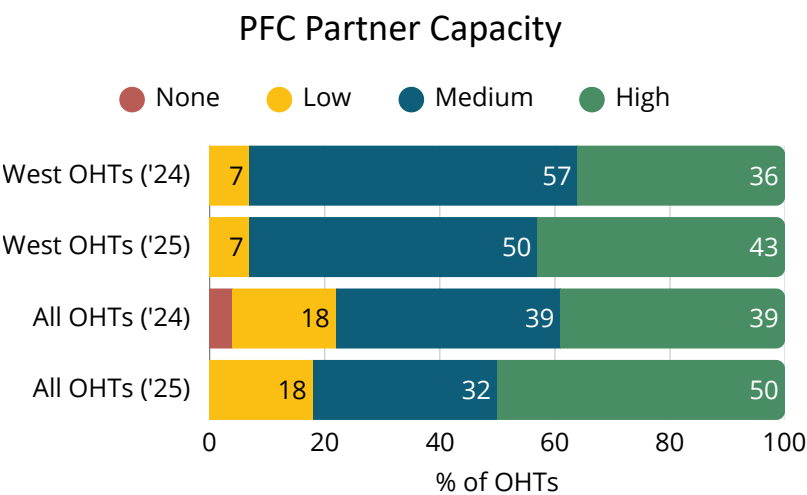
As with the West region, most of the **OHTs across the province** were performing at a medium level. Few were at a high level at both time points, with a full-time engagement lead in place. Nearly a quarter of OHTs at both time points were at the low level, with limited capacity available to support engagement.



PFC partner capacity refers to OHTs engaging with a sufficient number of PFC partners to allow them to be involved in all aspects of the OHT’s work, without causing too much burden on any one PFC partner.

Low	Medium	High
PFC partners are engaged but there is not a sufficient number to be able to contribute across a wide range of OHT activities (e.g., a small number, who are involved in a limited way); the number of PFC partners is such that if they were engaged fully across OHT activities they would quickly burnout	PFC partners are engaged with the OHT and there are enough of them to be engaged across a range of activities; the number of PFC partners may not be sufficient to prevent burnout	PFC partners are engaged across a wide range of OHT activities; there is sufficient capacity to allow for the OHT to have PFC participation in all areas without creating burnout for PFC partners

Elgin OHT was at the **low** level at both time points as only a small group of PFC partners are engaged in OHT work. There is a lack of PFC partner capacity to support full engagement across the OHT in a way that prevents burnout. Most OHTs in the West Region were at the medium or high level by 2025.



Comparison summary

The vast majority of OHTs in the **West Region** were at the medium or high level, demonstrating that most OHTs have focused on building PFC partner capacity.

A similar pattern was seen across **all OHTs** with an increase from 2024 to half of OHTs by 2025 performing at the high level. By 2025 no OHTs were at the ‘none’ level.

Development, learning and exchange

This Framework element focuses on **how OHTs are continuously learning and developing** - including capacity building, mentorship and evaluation to understand how engagement is unfolding and to learn from this and plan next steps.

PFC partner mentorship activities are the activities set up by an OHT to support the onboarding and ongoing capacity building of PFC partners - allowing PFC partners to learn from those with more experience within the OHT.

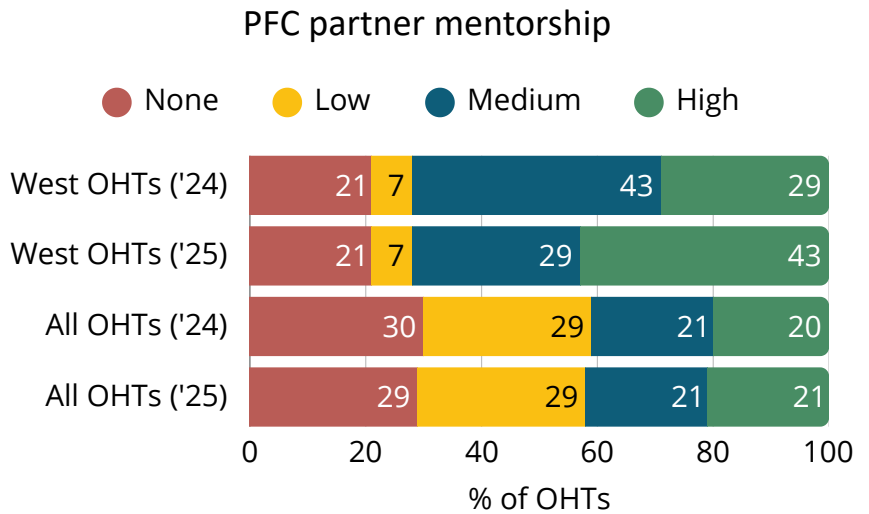
Low	Medium	High
Mentoring of PFC partners has been identified as a priority, and work is underway to determine the process / approach for mentorship.	Mentoring of PFC partners takes place, but not in a formal way.	Mentoring of PFC partners is in place as a formal learning and development process, with clear guidelines and plans associated with it.

At both time points the **Elgin OHT** was at a **medium** level. Mentorship has only been informally implemented.

Comparison summary

Nearly three-quarters of OHTs within the **West region** were at the medium or high level indicating mentorship is taking place, either formally or informally. The number of OHTs at the high level in 2025 was significantly higher than what was seen across all OHTs (43% vs 21%)

Across **all OHTs**, there was wide variation in the level of attention given to mentorship with 40% performing at the medium or high level, and the remaining OHTs split between no work taking place in this area or plans being underway.



Evaluation of PFC engagement and partnership is the formal activity undertaken to understand the process and impacts that engagement and partnership are having on the OHT as a whole, its programs and activities, and the people involved.

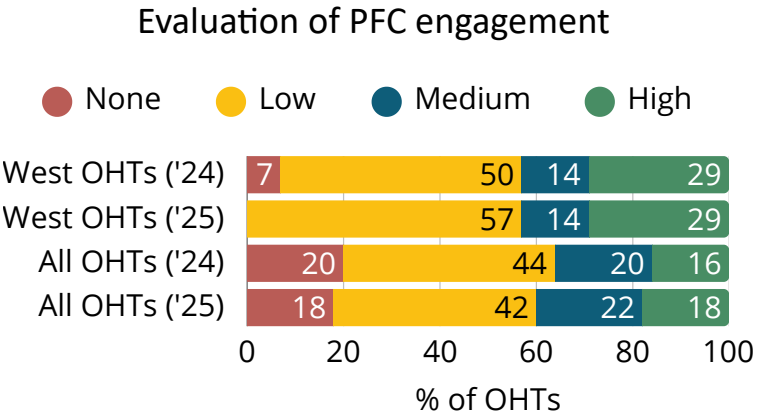
Low	Medium	High
Evaluation is under consideration	Evaluation work is occurring in an ad hoc or simple way (e.g., evaluation surveys of basic process measures, one time evaluation activity)	An evaluation plan is in place with continuous process and impact evaluation strategies being implemented.

Elgin OHT was at the **low** level at both time points as an evaluation plan is in progress. This level of achievement is similar to just over half of OHTs in the West Region in 2025.

Comparison Summary

A greater number of OHTs in the **West region** have reached the high level compared to all OHTs, and by 2025 there were no OHTs in this region that had not started on this work.

Over half of **all OHTs** were performing at the low or none level at both time points. A small proportion were at the high level.



Participation in exchange activities refers to OHTs’ staff and/or PFC partners’ participation in formal opportunities to share knowledge with and learn from other OHTs, including the PFC engagement and partnership Community of Practice (CoP) and other CoPs, networks and exchange opportunities.

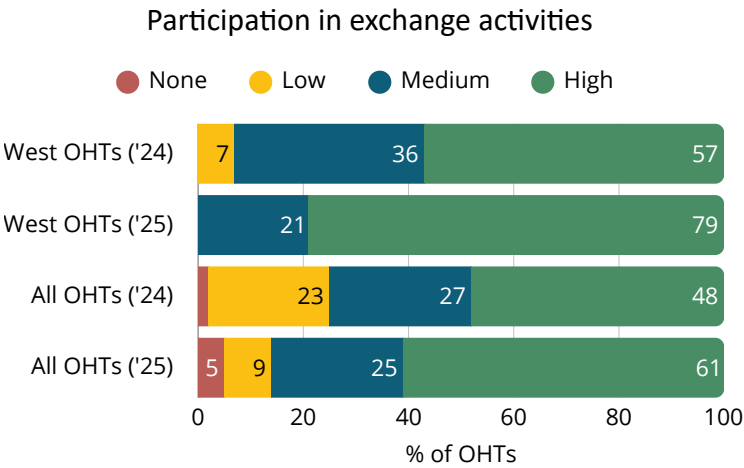
Low	Medium	High
OHT staff / PFC partners rarely participate in CoPs or OHT networks to share engagement-related practices and experiences	OHT staff / PFC partners actively participate in the CoP and / or participate in two other exchange opportunities.	The OHT prioritises participation in exchange activities with multiple individuals participating in the CoP on a regular basis and / or in multiple (3 +) other exchange opportunities.

Elgin OHT was at a **medium** level in 2024 and increased to **high** in 2025 as participation in the PFC Engagement and Partnership CoP and other activities increased.

Comparison Summary

Looking at both the **West region OHTs** and **all OHTs**, there was an increase from 2024 to 2025 in the number of OHTs performing at the high level.

Across the West region, all OHTs were at the medium or high level by 2025. Across all OHTs, there were still some OHTs performing at the low and none levels in 2025, but that number had decreased from 2024.

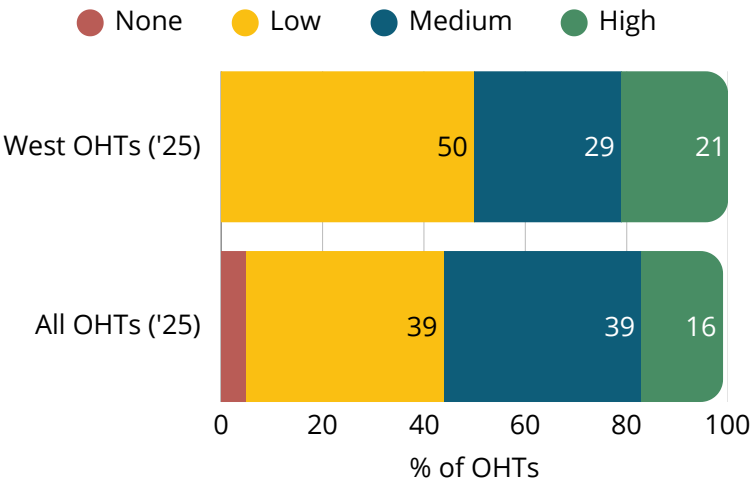


Participation in learning activities refers to participating in formal learning opportunities around engagement and partnership. Due to data availability, this was measured in 2025 only. This looked at participation in the engagement and partnership for people centred care microcredential, participation in coaching and in other learning activities.

Low	Medium	High
The OHT minimally participates in learning activities. One individual has started / completed the micro-credential, participates in coaching or other learning activities.	The OHT actively participates in learning activities. More than one individual has completed the microcredential, participates in coaching or other learning activities.	The OHT prioritizes learning activities, sending multiple individuals to attend the micro-credential and in multiple other learning activities.

Elgin OHT was at a **medium** level with some participation in learning activities, but not in a comprehensive way.

Participation in learning activities (2025 only)



Comparison summary

Half of OHTs in the **West region** were at the low level for participation in learning activities, a higher number than for OHTs all combined.

Across **all OHTs**, few were at the high level, demonstrating lower overall participation in learning activities compared to exchange activities.

Section 3: Summary of progress, recommendations and next steps

This section presents a summary of Elgin OHT's progress on the key Framework elements as of Fall 2025, along with suggested next steps to move to the more advanced level or to maintain the current level (if already at the high level). With each suggested next step, examples of how other OHTs have progressed in this area are provided, based on information shared through study interviews and other data sources.

Structures & Enablers		Score as of Fall 2025	Suggested next steps and examples from other OHTs
Policies & Strategies	Engagement approach / strategy	Medium	Review and update the engagement approach/strategy as needed. Consider developing a schedule upon which the engagement strategy can be reviewed (annually), consider pairing this with the development of the annual PFAC work plan to ensure the documents are related and build off each other
	Compensation approach / strategy	Medium	Develop a formal compensation policy to provide guidance for remuneration. - Outline scheduled time points for reviewing the compensation strategy with PFC partners, being clear about how frequently this can be updated - Ensure the strategy meets the needs of a wide range of lived experience partners - Having an established structure for compensation can be seen as a commitment to the value of PFC partners - Consider a tiered approach to compensation where the amount depends on the intensity of the role (e.g., a base compensation + additional amounts per working group, leadership role, etc.)

Structures & approaches	Inclusion of PFC partners in governance	High	Continue to engage a PFC partner as part of the leadership of the governance table Consider sharing successes with the co-chair model with other OHTs in the region and provincially to assist other OHTs in reaching this level.
	PFC engagement across the OHT	Medium	Consider how to bring additional PFC partners to the OHT to ensure there is sufficient capacity for all OHT committees to have at least 2 PFC partners. - See suggestions for increasing capacity below in the “PFC partner capacity” section Ensure all OHT committees are supportive of and committed to PFC engagement and partnership. To do so, other OHTs have taken the following steps: - Maintain a consistent culture that highlights that PFC partners play a central role in all OHT work - Ensure all OHT staff and partners are aware of the importance and value of engaging with PFC partners, this can be done through inclusion of engagement in OHT structures and processes, highlighting PFC partner contributions/impacts made to OHT work, providing support/resources for engagement, etc. - Provide engagement training/resources to each working group, committee, and table to further ensure PFC partners are embedded in meaningful ways
Capacity	Staff support for engagement	Medium	Identify ways to increase staff support for engagement to a 1.0 FTE, noting that this could be one or more individuals taking on the role. Other OHTs have considered the following: Consider partnerships with academic institutions and students who would be able to assist with engagement work as an alternate way to reach 1.0 FTE (e.g., work placements, co-ops, etc).
	PFC partner capacity	Low	Consider how to bring additional PFC partners to the OHT to ensure there is sufficient capacity for all OHT committees to have at least 2 PFC partners. Other OHTs have considered the following: - Develop a pool of patient partners/a patient partner network for advisors who may be more interested in joining specific projects with more short-term commitments - Consider the potential to collaborate with OHT partner organizations to help develop this network - Discuss ways to conduct broader engagement with community members for one-off engagement opportunities or drop-in engagement sessions

Development, learning & exchange	PFC partner mentorship	Medium	Continue the process to develop a PFC mentorship program. OHTs that have built these programs have taken the following approach: - Consider pairing new PFC partners with experienced PFC partners to help them learn what to expect within the OHT, to answer questions and to help them feel comfortable - The pairing process can be embedded into onboarding procedures - Consider a review / evaluation of the program as it unfolds to understand if it is meeting PFC partner needs Continue to build and develop evaluation plans and activities. Consider how to move forward with the evaluation of PFC engagement and partnership activities using some or all of the following ideas from other OHTs: - Designate a staff member (or multiple) to lead evaluation work and include it in the OHT's operational plans - Conduct yearly evaluations to identify areas of success and areas for improvement; consider using existing evaluation tools (e.g., PPEET, Engage with Impact Toolkit) - Conduct more frequent, informal check-ins with committee members, PFC partners to see how engagement is unfolding and to address any issues early Continue to encourage participation in knowledge exchange & learning activities. Other OHTs have considered: - Find ways for the PFACs within the local region to collaborate and connect to share learnings, build capacity and share support - Share opportunities widely as they become available - Be clear about the purpose or goal of the training and why it is recommended so individuals view this as an opportunity rather than a burden - Share information about CoPs and other resources as part of onboarding processes for staff and PFC partners, and encourage participation as part of a job description
	Evaluation of PFC engagement and partnership	Low	
	Participation in knowledge exchange activities	High	
	Participation in learning activities	Medium	

As a next step, we suggest reviewing the examples from OHTs above to consider how you can continue to progress towards an engagement capable OHT. For support with implementing these next steps, please consider:

- Joining a Community of Practice to learn from other OHTs and other experts in the field through presentations, discussions and information sharing
 - PFC Engagement and Partnering CoP
 - Communications and Community Engagement CoP
- Connecting with your OH Region to learn more about other OHTs in your regions that have had success in your area of focus to learn from their experiences

Thank you for your OHT's participation in the Build ECEs study. We hope that these results will be useful for your OHT. Our next phase of data collection will begin in late Fall 2026 / early Winter 2027 and we will share findings from that phase of the project after it is complete.

For more information on the Building Engagement Capable Environments for Health System Transformation Implementation Study, please see the study page on the PPEC Website:
<https://ppe.mcmaster.ca/engagement-capable-environments-health-system-transformation/>

