



Podcast transcript

The future of human and social services: Connected care and support

Episode 1

**Martin:**

Hey everyone, how's it going? It's Martin Joyce here. Today we are going to talk about the future human and social services here in Canada. And I have a colleague with me a leader in this space, Michael capers. Michael is a partner here at KPMG. Michael, just want to introduce yourself to the listeners.

Mike:

Absolutely. Thanks, Martin. It's a pleasure to be here. So as Martin said, I work in the human and social services space, across Canada, with governments and nonprofit providers of all different levels, on a range of Business and Technology transformations in their organizations to help support vulnerable Canadians.

Martin:

Excellent, Mike. So today, we are going to traverse a number of topics. And we're going to think through what is the future of human social services here in Canada. And, and obviously, just given the fact that we are still in the midst of a pandemic, you know, this sector in particular, has borne the brunt of some of the implications of that. And we have seen some interesting changes, not just here in Canada, but also globally with, with the service sector, and things around virtual care, things around technology, things around service redesigned to ensure that vulnerable populations can safely still receive the services and supports they need.

And that's going to shape I think, the future of this sector for the long term. Because it's very difficult to see when this ends, when this pandemic ends, and hopefully, we're not too far off that, this sector going back to what I was doing before. I think we've learned a lot of new things. I think the sector in particular, has innovated in a number of different ways, and has shown the ability to, you know, do things differently very, very quickly. There wasn't a lot of time to change. And I think they've shown a willingness to adopt some of these innovations. And so we're going to talk about some of these things, not just today, but over a series of podcasts. But Mike, I just want to ask you the first question.

And it's really around when you're thinking about human and social services, the government and the organizations that deliver to vulnerable populations. Have you seen a shift in how they view service delivery and their clients?

Mike:

Yeah, I mean, I think that's a really good question. Martin, I think, you know, particularly COVID, has highlighted a lot of that for organizations. I think prior to COVID. You saw governments and organizations starting to rethink through that. I know KPMG did a survey of human and social services organizations, and eight out of 10 of the organizations that we surveyed, said they were making customer centric strategy, their priority. And when we talk about customer, we're talking about the clients, the end users who are ultimately served by this and really putting them back at the center.

And I think client centered thinking has always been sort of at the forefront of the sector. But I think particularly it's been more poignant over the past few months that we've been living in this new environment. You know, COVID has certainly impacted people disproportionately, who live in poverty or who are homeless, and particularly those who are on the fringes of those risk factors before COVID suddenly found themselves living in those situations. So governments really had to respond. And I know in Ontario, Ontario launched COVID hubs that really tried to integrate some of the social services to make it easier for people to access assistance programs, we saw a range of different responses across the country to homelessness, whether it was government leasing hotel space that was vacant and providing those opportunities for people who were living in homelessness, or were fleeing domestic violence to be able to access shelters.

Particularly, I think the biggest lasting impact from COVID is really the child care conversation. And I think particularly mothers and working mothers, whether they're single, or they work in dual parent, families, childcare has become a real situation across the country. I know my own colleagues who I work alongside that struggle a bit with trying to find suitable

childcare. And you know, I can't imagine people who live in, in particular Heart to Heart situations, you know, lower socio economic situations, who can't afford basic childcare or can't afford to take off work. So, you know, responses to childcare, whether that's increasing the level of funding, whether that's increasing the level of access to spaces, you know, there's a whole range of things and I think we saw that with the federal announcement around trying to create a national childcare strategy, trying to move into that direction. I think the last area just from a customer perspective is around disability, and particularly disability is it becoming more, I would say, from a government perspective, their sustainability challenges around the programming that's offered.

Typically, it was created sort of a patchwork of responses to various policy issues. People are living longer now we have more recognition of a greater range of disabilities. So mental health being a primary driver of a number of disability conditions for people now. And so we have to think about how to how to shift the preventative range of disability services, really around better supporting people as children. And then ultimately, you know, for adults there, they're more set up for success. And I think that's about learning about the lifetime trajectories. And, you know, we did a piece of work with a provincial government around mapping the lifetime trajectory of children as they move through the disability system. And that was really helpful to understand some of the pain points and barriers that that people face from that a customer centric perspective.

Martin:

The interesting thing about the customer centricity is really the personalization agenda, right? Where the service system doesn't respond to the client group as a homogenous group, you know, they all don't have the same issues, they all don't have the same impacts as a result of those issues. And it's really understanding that there are groups of people that require a different set of supports at different times with varying levels of intensity. And the service system must respond in that way. And, you know, you think about customer centricity, and the only way you can figure what those impacts are and how they and how a person reacts to them, and what they need, and the intensity levels, is to really understand your cohort of clients that are coming through your door.

Mike:

Yep, no. And I would totally agree with that. I think it and that comes back to sort of the future of human and social services in terms of understanding the client more, right? And what kind of information do we need to gather and from which different sources because we often sort of see them from the social ends come in, but maybe they've attached the healthcare system at some point, and particularly in the siloed way that governments are designed, you know, it doesn't give us the ability to see that sort of cross cutting information of a client and their story, to really help to inform what kind of responses would be best suited to that person's situation? I guess, sort of thinking around the sort of the integration of human and social services, Martin, what do you think the future of service delivery holds for human and social services?

Martin:

Yeah, look, I think the continuation of the of the personalization agenda is a big factor in this, how to services respond to individual circumstances. And this isn't about not having consistency. This is really about understanding how can you have the greatest impact on that person at that time? And then to your point? How do you get that information? How do you collect that information? And how do you really understand and relay that back to government, that you are having this impact? Okay. And so I think, rebinding, the service system is going to be critical in this and there are movements, and there was movements before COVID.

Around that, you know, you and I have seen examples in jurisdictions across Canada, where governments were, as you know, the lexicon is modernizing service delivery, because I think there was a recognition that we are in 2021. And we do need to make them more contemporary. I think that's the biggest one, I think the other one that comes along with that service system sort of modernization is how do you reduce the fragmentation across the system. And by that, I mean, you do get a different experience potentially going to a different support service. And it's a very hard system to navigate. And I think that's well recognized.

And so how do you make it easy for people who are vulnerable and have some very serious issues to deal with? How do you make it easy for them to find the support they need? You know, it can be quite difficult. So I think reducing fragmentation is the second one. And I do think, Michael, I think you and I will touch on this, but this is technology driven reform that's been going on, you know, as a result of COVID. You know, everybody's going digital, and everybody's going with new technology, and everybody's going virtual, you know, that is critical in this sector for a number of reasons. One is they do have to rethink how they integrate, you know, some virtual into the service system.

And that's partly as a result of COVID and try to, you know, maintain working spaces for their staff and safe interactions with clients. It's also about how do you efficiently work with people. And sometimes people want to do it by phone or online because it's more convenient for them. And so rethinking that. There is a tendency, though, and I think we just have to be aware of this on the technology side of it, it's not, when on technology, it's not, it's not either all in person, or all technology, there has to be a balance, right? There are always circumstances where in person will always be better, there will always be services that are better done in person.

So I think we're at a point now, where we've tested virtual really quickly over a 10 month period, and we've tested technology, that we can start to make some of these decisions about what's the best approach and the best balance for the organization's and also, more importantly, for their clients. So I think service redesign, I think reducing fragmentation, and then how do you upgrade, increase and utilize technology in a different way.

Mike:

I think you're right, hitting on your last point there just around sort of what the reason situation has, has resulted in, it's resulted in lots of really innovative and rapid thinking around using technology in different ways, right. And I, I completely agree with you that when we think about modernization, it's not about pushing everything to a website, or to an app or artificial intelligence, there needs to be that balance between, you know, click call and come in, you know, the in person, the virtual and the and the online, you know, self service sort of approaches.

And I think we're starting to see that, I think the human and social services sector, particularly in Canada, has been behind on the technology friend for a long time. And I think that this COVID situation has sort of forced the hand a bit in terms of trying to accelerate some of that work. I know, you know, one of the pieces of work that we did for a Toronto based charity was around, you know, helping that organization to shift from sort of very in-person approach to delivering food for children in schools, to suddenly shifting to a digital platform to enable them to still do that. And to fill that mandate of when schools were shut down, and people moved to online work learning, children were unable to access food in the schools anymore.

So how do we make sure that they're still able to do that? Right? Yeah, it's really called into question how we how we have to pivot quickly. And, you know, they were able to do that in a really rapid way with, you know, not having to invest in really expensive technology. And I think that's the other piece of it is the investment side. I think human and social services organizations kind of have this expectation that technology is always going to be really expensive. But you have to balance that technology with, with how you change your service delivery model, and how you change your organization and maybe your structure as well, to accommodate that.

I think mobile technologies is going to be the next big wave in the human and social services space, particularly to enable caseworkers to work in the fields more, because if they're not able to return to their offices, and they have to work from, you know, work from home, work from their car, or whatever, I think in terms of the virtual care that you talked about, you know, being able to face to face with caregiver and the client that they're working with, in a virtual ways that they don't lose that touch. I mean, the proliferation of virtual care apps over the past, I would say, year has been exponential across, like, you look at, you know, just even the use of zoom. Right?

And yeah, maybe organizations are using that as their platform, because it's infrastructure that already exists. There's lots of things out there that work. What else have you seen Martin, I guess from a technology perspective, and HSS or other trends that reflect the future of?

Martin:

Yeah, it's a good question. I mean, the research that we did, you highlighted that 81% of executives in this sector, have a priority around digital technology, and enabling all the architecture that sits behind, you know, all of that stuff, right. I think the other side of it that is interesting is where you can use technology to do processes slightly differently. And, and we have seen that he certainly in Ontario, in one particular sector, where, you know, they, they did a lot of home based reviews, and they move those online. And in fact, you know, about not the whole process, about 90% of it. But it just allowed them to do more and to do it differently, and to realize that they didn't need to travel all of the time in the car to go to all of these different sides, that they could sit there and do it virtually.

For the most part, right. There was still elements that still needed to be done in person. I needed somebody on site at the time, but it's also that integration around the business processes for the organization's and service providers. So it isn't just about the care side of it, it's about, you know, how do you do inspections differently? Or how do you do intake and assessments differently in order to deal with growing demand, growing complexity, you know, and the outcomes that COVID are going to have on the population.

And, you know, once the pandemic ends, that doesn't mean the impacts will end, right. They're going to be felt for, I'd say, years to come on a whole range of fronts. So I think that's the other thing that I've seen, Michael is, organizations have been really willing to relook at, you know, the operational side of their entities as well. And I think that's been encouraging. And people have leapt into it, you know, we've had sessions with stakeholders in this space. And they've all said, you know, how quickly that everybody's gravitated towards doing things differently.

And nobody has put up any sort of protests around "No, no, that that's the old way, we're staying with the old way". Virtually, everybody has said, well, we're in this situation, we're going to have to do it differently. So let's just do it differently, and figure it out as we go. And and the point about going back to the old way, I think, the longer this lasts, the less chance that's ever going to happen. Right?

Mike:

Yeah, absolutely.

Martin:

There was just one more thing, I think that's happened to you too. And I think this is more on the human side of it, is, I think, if you can call a positive in a pandemic, but I think it has shown the value of the workforce in this space, the value of personal carers, and the value of foster carers and the value of, you know, people who are working on the frontlines with vulnerable groups day after day after day, I think this is just

shone a light on that, and showing the true value of what they bring to our communities. Right and to, you know, our various provinces in and Canada as a country. And I think, and I think that's a good thing. Unfortunately, the pandemic to do that. But I think now people really understand the value of the of the staff and the workers and the carers in this sector, like they didn't before. And, you know, maybe, maybe that's one thing that we can keep keep carrying forward.

Mike:

Absolutely. I totally agree with you on that. Maybe as we wrap up, let me just point out that we've just recently published the future of human and social services. So it's a publication that really talks about how organizations are thinking about building connected enterprises. So building on that conversation we're having around integration and reducing fragmentation. So you know, if people are interested, there's lots of great examples in there that are based on inputs from global leaders in the HSS space across Canada and around the world and includes some examples, and even just things that they're thinking about and some of the concerns that they're having. So I'd encourage our listeners to pick up the publication and slip through it and read through it.

Martin:

Absolutely. Excellent. On this note, Michael, we might wrap up and give everybody back their time. It's been a pleasure, everybody. Hopefully, you found some value in this podcast. Hopefully, the ideas resonate with you and the end the discussion. This is the first one we are going to do a series of these, talking about the future of human essential services. And we'll focus on some different topics on each one. And if you ever have any questions, feel free to reach out to Michael or myself at any time. Thanks.

Mike:

Thank you.