

Breakaway Community Services Strategic Plan Development

Strategic Planning – Final Report

December 12, 2024

CONFIDENTIAL

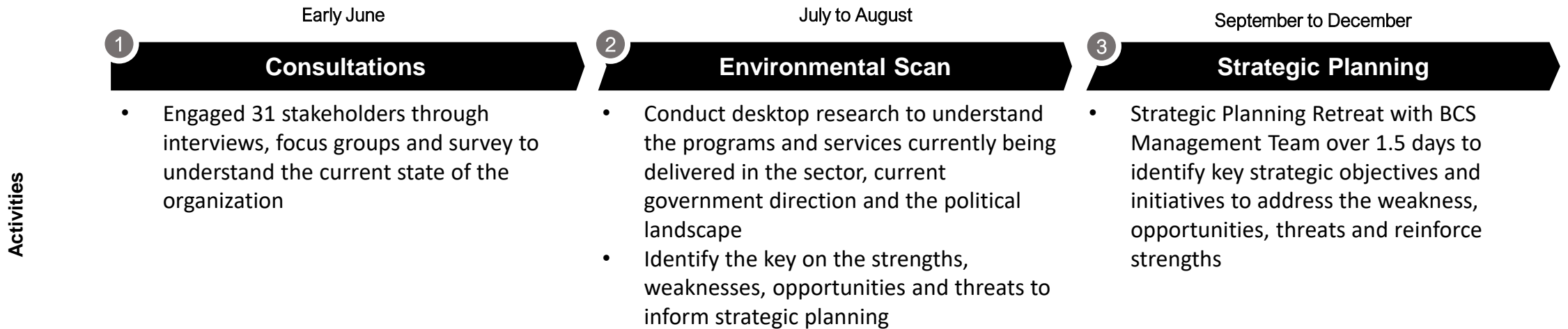
strategisense₁

Table of Contents

Item:	Page #
Executive Summary	3
Background and Objective	4
Environmental Scan Summary	5
Strategy Map	6
Next Steps	9
Appendices	10

Executive Summary

The strategic planning spanned 6 months, starting in early June until December to develop Breakaway Community Services' new five (5) year strategic plan. Through consultations and research, the key strategic issues, strengths, weakness, sector trends, opportunities and threats were identified. These were then addressed through the strategy map exercise to define the objectives and the associated initiatives that the organization would need to focus on.



Key Themes

- Expand range of services and incorporate cultural competency
- Workforce focus on organizational development and well-being
- Strengthen communication and decision-making
- Enhance funding diversification and sustainability

Key Strategic Objectives

Trauma Informed Client Centred Approach

Facilitating Access Through Partnerships

Be a Recognized Resource for Youth Harm Reduction

Organizational Effectiveness and Sustainability

Background and Objective

Background

Breakaway Community Services (BCS) is at a pivotal moment in its evolution, where strategic decisions are necessary to shape its future direction. With a new board in place and three major projects underway, BCS continues to demonstrate its commitment to serving diverse, marginalized, and racialized communities.

As part of its strategic planning process, an environmental scan was produced to provide a comprehensive overview of the internal and external factors impacting the organization, capturing insights from stakeholder consultations. The facilitated Strategic Planning Session with BCS' management team focused on:

- Reflecting on where the organization is, challenges and opportunities in the current environment, as summarized in the environmental scan
- Identifying the long-term strategic opportunities and priorities to address the BCS' current gaps and challenges
- Aligning on goals and objectives that BCS can realistically achieve in the upcoming strategy cycle
- Obtaining participant consensus on the strategic directions and next steps in the strategic planning process

Objective

Provide an overview of the key themes identified through consultations and research that informed the planning process that realized the strategic objectives and initiatives found in the Strategy Map to inform BCS' future direction.

Environmental Scan Summary

Key Themes of the Consultations

- Expand range of services and incorporate cultural competency
- Workforce focus on organizational development and well-being
- Strengthen communication and decision-making
- Enhance funding diversification and sustainability



Strengths

- A culture that encourages a **dedicated and passionate workforce** that is focused on meeting the harm reduction needs for specific populations and the community; **clients needs are centered** in approaches



Challenges and Areas of Improvement

- **Limited resources and focus dedicated to staff well-being and professional development**, this will be an area of risk as the organization positions itself to be more strategic and realize the objectives of its new strategic plan



Future Roles, Strategies, Opportunities

- **Broaden the program and services scope** beyond substance use
- **New provincial funding** to address homelessness and addictions recovery
- **Integrate advocacy work** into the organization and position BCS to be a harm reduction advocate
- **Address unmet needs** through culturally informed programs and services



Critical External Trends/Threats

- **Increased governmental and public scrutiny** of harm reduction approaches and safe consumption sites restricts the ability to effectively serve clients experiencing mental health and addiction challenges

Strategic Opportunities Identified

Integrated Health and Social Services

Financial Sustainability and Funding Diversification

Building Workforce Sustainability

Culturally Relevant Services

Strengthening Community-Based Research and Advocacy

Expansion of Services Beyond Substance Use

Strategy Map

The illustration on the following page captures the proposed strategic themes and objectives for Breakaway Community Services (BCS) using a strategy map layout.

A strategy map is a tool used as part of the Balanced Scorecard Methodology. It is intended to tell the story of how an organization will achieve its mission and goals through strategic objectives linked by assumed cause-and-effect relationships. These objectives are organized across four perspectives: Stakeholder/Community Impact, Client Value, Internal Processes and Capacities, and Organizational Enablers.

We have proposed four strategic themes for BCS, each addressing the organization's mission to provide inclusive, trauma-informed, harm-reduction services that meet individual and community needs. These themes were developed using insights and priorities raised by participants during the recent strategic planning retreat.

The strategic themes are as follows:

- **Trauma-Informed, Client-Centered Approach:** Prioritizing the unique needs and voices of each client, enhancing support services that are client-driven and culturally responsive, and ensuring all staff and programs operate with a foundation of trauma-informed care.
- **Be a Recognized Resource for Youth Harm Reduction:** Expanding youth programming to include youth-designed initiatives, knowledge-sharing, and empowerment, with the aim of being a recognized resource for youth harm reduction.
- **Facilitating Access through Partnerships:** Deepening and broadening partnerships, especially with organizations that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion, to create new pathways for underserved populations to access services.
- **Organizational Effectiveness and Sustainability:** Initiatives aimed at funding diversification, focus on creating a culture of staff wellness, and digital modernization to support BCS's growth while maintaining high standards of care.

Each theme includes specific objectives, which are captured on the strategy map in the white boxes. These objectives lay out BCS's focus areas for the upcoming strategic cycle and are informed by key issues identified at the retreat.

For each strategic theme, statements or definitions can be developed to clarify the intended focus. For each objective, key performance indicators (KPIs) and initiatives will be identified in the next phase of the planning process to support successful execution and measurement.



Impact

Our commitment to our community and stakeholders

Our Mission: Breakaway Community Services is dedicated to transforming lives through accessible, compassionate, trauma-informed harm reduction and mental health supports. We collaborate with individuals to overcome challenges, achieve their goals, and thrive in a loving, open environment.



Client Value

The positive impact we will create for clients

Trauma Informed Client Centred Approach

Be a Recognized Resource for Youth Harm Reduction

Increased access to resources reflective of clients' needs

Affirmed experiences of the programs and services to support clients' needs and goals

Enhanced harm reduction, mental health, and grief related capacity and shared knowledge to support sector capacity building

Facilitate seamless transition from youth to adult services

Expand and deliver culturally safe, trauma-informed client supports.

Share resources to drive evidence-informed practices and transform youth mental health

Support youth to take an active role in advocacy, peer support, and harm reduction

Integrate programs organization-wide to address client-identified needs.



Capacities

What we must excel at in terms of key internal capacities and processes

Facilitating Access Through Partnerships

Build strategic partnerships to improve access to holistic services across multiple entry points.

Strengthen partnerships to provide culturally safe services for equity-deserving communities



Resources

Our people, resources and enablers that will be key for success

Organizational Effectiveness and Sustainability

Ensure workforce sustainability and a culture of staff wellness

Attract and develop a workforce that is reflective of clients served

Grow and diversify funding sources

Secure physical space

Strengthen digital infrastructure and presence



Values

The foundation of HOW we achieve our strategy

Our Values

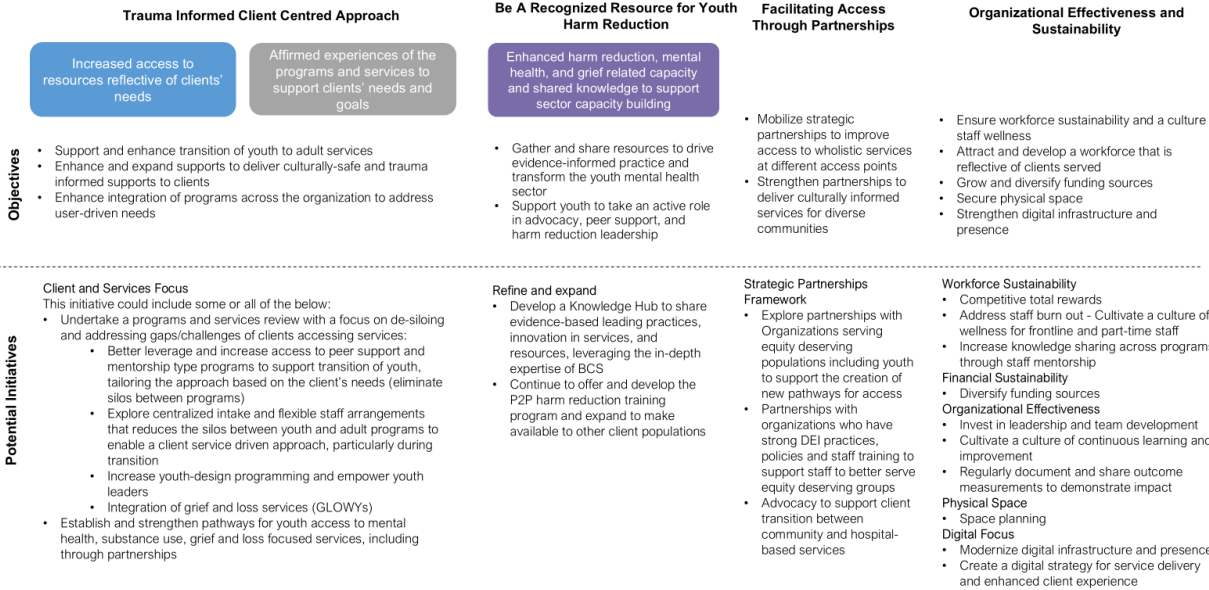
Evidence-Based and Outcome Measured | Safe, Positive and Supportive | Intersectional and Culturally Safe
Accessible, Inclusive and Flexible | Strengths Based and Client Centred | Harm Reduction and Trauma Informed

Key Initiatives Aligned to Strategic Objectives

To enable the achievement of the strategic objectives, the associated key initiatives identified in the following slide describe the major activities that need to be incorporated into the implementation planning. The strategic objectives run from left to right on the top half of the page and the associated initiatives aligned to the objectives are listed below.

As the BCS Management Team works together to further refine, define and identify the more detailed activities aligned to the objectives, the initiatives will also have to be prioritized based on the organization’s current capacity and need to address its strategic issues. Once the activities have been incorporated into the implementation plan, expect that they will and can change to meet the evolving needs of the organization.

Key Initiatives



strategisense

Key Initiatives

Trauma Informed Client Centred Approach

Increased access to resources reflective of clients' needs

Affirmed experiences of the programs and services to support clients' needs and goals

Objectives

- Support and enhance transition of youth to adult services
- Enhance and expand supports to deliver culturally-safe and trauma informed supports to clients
- Enhance integration of programs across the organization to address user-driven needs

Be A Recognized Resource for Youth Harm Reduction

Enhanced harm reduction, mental health, and grief related capacity and shared knowledge to support sector capacity building

- Gather and share resources to drive evidence-informed practice and transform the youth mental health sector
- Support youth to take an active role in advocacy, peer support, and harm reduction leadership

Facilitating Access Through Partnerships

- Mobilize strategic partnerships to improve access to wholistic services at different access points
- Strengthen partnerships to deliver culturally informed services for diverse communities

Organizational Effectiveness and Sustainability

- Ensure workforce sustainability and a culture staff wellness
- Attract and develop a workforce that is reflective of clients served
- Grow and diversify funding sources
- Secure physical space
- Strengthen digital infrastructure and presence

Potential Initiatives

Client and Services Focus

This initiative could include some or all of the below:

- Undertake a programs and services review with a focus on de-siloing and addressing gaps/challenges of clients accessing services:
 - Better leverage and increase access to peer support and mentorship type programs to support transition of youth, tailoring the approach based on the client's needs (eliminate silos between programs)
 - Explore centralized intake and flexible staff arrangements that reduces the silos between youth and adult programs to enable a client service driven approach, particularly during transition
 - Increase youth-design programming and empower youth leaders
 - Integration of grief and loss services (GLoW) for Youth
- Establish and strengthen pathways for youth access to mental health, substance use, grief and loss focused services, including through partnerships

Refine and expand

- Develop a Knowledge Hub to share evidence-based leading practices, innovation in services, and resources, leveraging the in-depth expertise of BCS
- Continue to offer and develop the P2P harm reduction training program and expand to make available to other client populations

Strategic Partnerships Framework

- Explore partnerships with Organizations serving equity deserving populations including youth to support the creation of new pathways for access
- Partnerships with organizations who have strong DEI practices, policies and staff training to support staff to better serve equity deserving groups
- Advocacy to support client transition between community and hospital-based services

Workforce Sustainability

- Competitive total rewards
- Address staff burn out - Cultivate a culture of wellness for frontline and part-time staff
- Increase knowledge sharing across programs through staff mentorship

Financial Sustainability

- Diversify funding sources

Organizational Effectiveness

- Invest in leadership and team development
- Cultivate a culture of continuous learning and improvement
- Regularly document and share outcome measurements to demonstrate impact

Physical Space

- Space planning

Digital Focus

- Modernize digital infrastructure and presence
- Create a digital strategy for service delivery and enhanced client experience

Next Steps – Detailed Implementation Planning

Detailed Implementation Planning

Utilizing the organizational wide strategic implementation planning template provided, BCS' Management Team should identify the implementation activities aligned to the strategic objectives identified. This plan should be reviewed on a regular basis at Management Team meetings to discuss and report on progress made.

Milestones/Tasks – these are the major activities or milestones that need to be acted upon to achieve the initiatives, these are not meant to be granular in nature as teams are still expected to have their own project plans.

Roles/Responsibilities – assign a most responsible individual and support team members to ensure there are clear accountabilities of the tasks.

Timelines – ensure that they are realistic, in this template they can be planned quarter by quarter; the more detailed project plans for each initiative should plan activities weekly or monthly; timing will also support prioritization of tasks based on available organizational capacity to carry out initiatives.

Measures of Success – celebrate milestones as they are completed and regularly report progress to the organization and the Board to maintain momentum and excitement, tracking completion can be an onerous task but is important to provide visibility into the progress of the strategic plan.

Approve the New Strategic Plan and Communicate

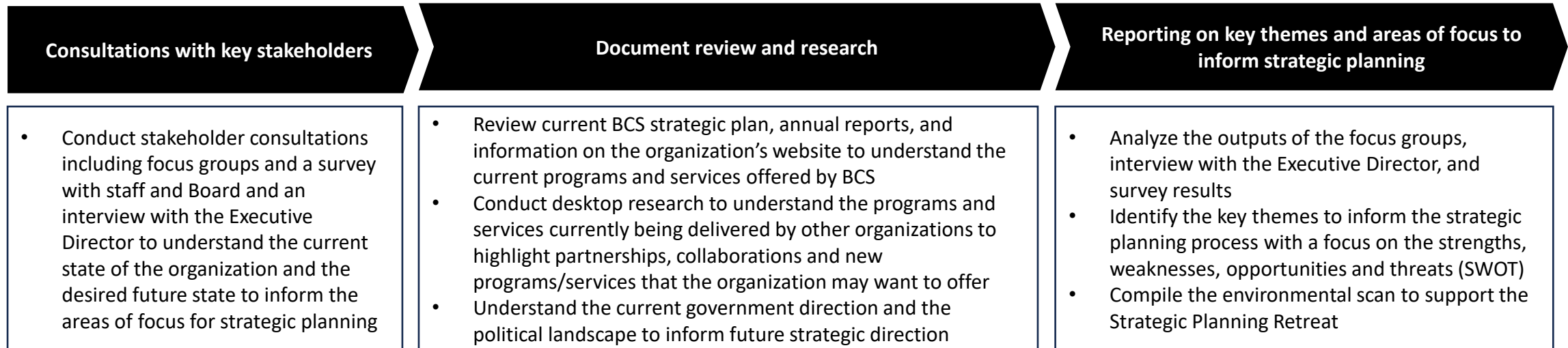
Once the new strategic plan has been approved by the BCS Board of Directors, the new strategy should be communicated to internal and external stakeholders, including the key themes and strategic issues used to inform the plan.

Appendix

Environmental Scan Report

Approach and Methodology for Environmental Scan

Strategisense has conducted a high-level environmental scan, summarized below, to provide Breakaway Community Services with an overview of the current harm reduction services landscape and the key themes from our consultations to inform their next strategic plan. Below is an overview of the process



31 Participants
Staff
Board

Key Themes and Analysis from Consultations and Research

Key Themes from Consultations

1. Expanding services and incorporating cultural competency

- There is a desire and need in the community to provide services beyond substance use, including areas such as **financial literacy seminars, employment support services** and **addressing the systematic barriers** that harm reduction clients face.
- Incorporate **culturally sensitive, relevant and trauma informed** programming to reduce the barriers of access to clients. Particularly for **First Nations and Indigenous** clients, incorporate more **traditional healing** and **non-colonial care approaches**.
- Enhancing services to **strengthen collaboration** between **teams** within the organization as well as with **other sector partners**.

2. Workforce focus on organizational development and well-being

- Strengthen the **onboarding, training and management oversight** for existing and new staff, this includes focus on **anti-oppression and trauma-informed training** and **other areas of skills development**.
- Continue to **support staff and their well being**, this includes ensuring a culture of care, support and dedication while highlighting the importance of **work-life balance, peer supervision** and **creating a supportive learning environment** with strong **psychological safety**.

3. Communication and decision-making

- Staff expressed that they **value transparency** and **clear communication**, particularly in **decision-making around supervision, compensation, and organizational changes**. While communication practices are in place, some staff feel there could be further opportunities for inclusion in decision-making processes. Management acknowledges that while full transparency is not always feasible due to the nature of managerial responsibilities, ongoing efforts are made to ensure appropriate and timely communication.

4. Funding diversification and sustainability

- Those consulted identified the importance of **financial sustainability**, including **diversifying streams of revenue** through fundraising and new sources of funds, this will ultimately enable the organization to attract and retain talent through competitive compensation and total rewards
- Trends such as the **increased cost of living, widening wage gap** and **disparities in income** have grown significantly since the pandemic and have an impact on clients, staff and the organization. There is a continued need for **advocacy for clients** to support their wellness and to navigate systemic barriers.

Current Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats

We have identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the organization to help inform the focus areas for the next strategic plan. This analysis draws on insights from focus groups, interviews, and a desktop review of trends in the sector and environment, aiming to enhance BCS ability to better meet the needs of individuals facing mental health and addiction challenges.

Strengths

- A culture that encourages a **dedicated and passionate workforce** that is focused on meeting the harm reduction needs for specific populations and the community; **clients needs are centered** in approaches
- **Innovative and agile** in responding to **evolving needs**, particularly during the pandemic to address the systemic barriers that clients face
- Incorporating individuals with lived experiences at the forefront of the work

Challenges and Areas of Improvement

- **Limited resources and focus dedicated to staff well-being and professional development**, this will be an area of risk as the organization positions itself to be more strategic and realize the objectives of its new strategic plan
- A perception among staff of **varying levels of understanding of organizational strategy** across the organization
- Robust **research and program evaluation processes are limited**, which impacts the ability to be a more evidence driven organization
- Increased financial risk due to **limited fundraising and diversified streams of revenue**

Future Roles, Strategies, Opportunities

- **Broaden the program and services scope** beyond substance use
- Leverage **collaboration and partnership opportunities** with other organizations (e.g., Mid-West Toronto OHT, future HARTs) to provide more comprehensive services to the community, advocacy efforts and to diversify revenue streams
- **New provincial funding** to address homelessness and addictions recovery
- **Integrate advocacy work** into the organization and position BCS to be a harm reduction advocate
- **Address unmet needs** through culturally informed programs and services

Critical External Trends/Threats

- **Increased governmental and public scrutiny** of harm reduction approaches and safe consumption sites restricts the ability to effectively serve clients experiencing mental health and addiction challenges
- An **early provincial election in Fall 2024 or Spring 2025** could change the province's direction on addressing mental health and addictions challenges
- **Potential consolidation of organizations** if governments were to scale back on investments made in community-based organizations

Strategic Opportunities

Breakaway Community Services (BCS) has several strategic opportunities that can help expand its impact and strengthen its role in providing harm reduction and mental health services. Based on current trends and the evolving landscape in Toronto, here are some key opportunities

Integrated Health and Social Services

With the growing emphasis on integrated care models within Ontario, BCS can explore expanding its existing harm reduction services to include comprehensive mental health, addiction, and housing support in one place. Partnering with organizations that offer wraparound services, such as the new HART Hubs being introduced in Ontario, would allow BCS to provide holistic care that meets the complex needs of its clients. This aligns with the broader trend of combining harm reduction, housing, and mental health care for marginalized populations

Financial Sustainability and Funding Diversification

Financial sustainability is a key concern, with a need to diversify revenue streams. Suggestions include exploring new funding opportunities, expanding advocacy efforts, and improving compensation to attract and retain talent amidst the rising cost of living and wage disparities.

Building Workforce Sustainability

To ensure long-term sustainability, BCS has the opportunity to strengthen staff onboarding, training, and management oversight. This includes a focus on anti-oppression and trauma-informed training for new and existing staff, as well as creating a culture of psychological safety through peer supervision and wellness initiatives. Emphasizing work-life balance and staff well-being will reduce burnout and improve retention. Given the challenges of increased cost of living and wage disparities, BCS can also advocate for wage adjustments and better working conditions, positioning itself as a leader in employee support.

Culturally Relevant Services

BCS has the opportunity to expand services that are specifically tailored for marginalized groups, such as racialized communities, immigrants, Indigenous and LGBTQ+ populations. Toronto is increasingly recognizing the need for culturally appropriate and trauma-informed care, particularly for groups disproportionately impacted by substance use and mental health issues. By developing culturally safe programs and/or partnering with other agencies with expertise in these services, BCS can better respond to the diverse needs of underserved populations.

Expansion of Services Beyond Substance Use

There is a clear demand for BCS to broaden its service offerings, incorporating support in areas like financial literacy, employment services, and addressing systemic barriers that harm reduction clients face. This includes integrating culturally sensitive and trauma-informed programming, especially for marginalized groups like Indigenous and racialized communities.

Strengthening Community-Based Research and Advocacy

BCS has an opportunity to position itself as a leader in harm reduction advocacy by participating in community-based research on the effectiveness of harm reduction strategies, such as supervised consumption sites and safer supply. Collaborating with academic institutions and policymakers could elevate BCS's role in influencing public health decisions and securing more funding for critical services.

Key Strategic Questions for Discussion

During the first strategic planning retreat, we will explore key strategic questions to identify the opportunities and areas of focus that are most strategic important for the organization. Outputs from our discussions will directly inform the strategy development including initiatives that need to be implemented. Below we have provided initial strategic questions emerging from the environmental scan for consideration at the retreat:

1. Where does BCS need to refocus to strengthen its outreach and services to better meet the needs of underserved populations, particularly by integrating more culturally responsive and trauma-informed care?
2. How do we leverage partnerships and collaboration when expanding programs and services that are already being provided by other organizations?
3. What opportunities or strategic levers can BCS employ to secure sustainable funding while remaining aligned with its core values of harm reduction and social justice?
4. Where does BCS have opportunity to enhance how it integrates advocacy into its organizational framework to continue to influence public policy and reduce stigma around harm reduction?
5. How can BCS continue to strengthen its workforce by fostering inclusivity and maintaining appropriate transparency, ensuring that communication practices align with both operational needs and staff expectations?
6. What role can BCS play in the broader health and social services ecosystem in Toronto, and how can it leverage collaborations to enhance service delivery and impact?

Appendix 1:

Strategic Analysis Framework

Strategic Analysis Framework

During the environmental scan of the strategic planning process, specific lines of inquiry, illustrated below, informed the key questions asked, and the information gathered and analyzed.

Areas of Inquiry	Focus	Consulted Stakeholders	Methods and Tools
1 Current Organization's Strengths and Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profile, reputation, and awareness • Organization's impact/outcomes • Operational strategies • Organizational strengths and challenges • Partnerships/collaborations • Other opportunities and constraints that may have impacted the implementation of mandate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Director • Board of Directors • Management • Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Group guides • Interview guide • Survey • Focused documentation review
2 System Priorities and Critical External Trends/ Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the key stakeholders and the priority needs/issues related to each, gaps/duplication, communication and transition • Changing community needs or demographics, socio-political, key sectors, government/public sector, social/health system organization and delivery, economic factors • Funding environment • Relevance and need; perceived value • Political climate; government priorities • Information/technological factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Director • Board of Directors • Management • Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Group guides • Interview guides • Survey • Focused documentation review – including identified environmental scan documents from across sectors, previous plans, reports, and funder reports
3 Future Organization's Roles, Strategies, and Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future roles and competencies • Market position (identity; mandate; unique role) • Potential partnerships/alliances • Future funding opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Director • Board of Directors • Management • Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Group guides • Interview guides • Survey • Documentation review – with a focus on documented strategies or plans, partners/collaborators, and funder reports

Appendix 2:

Organizational Profile

MISSION & VALUES



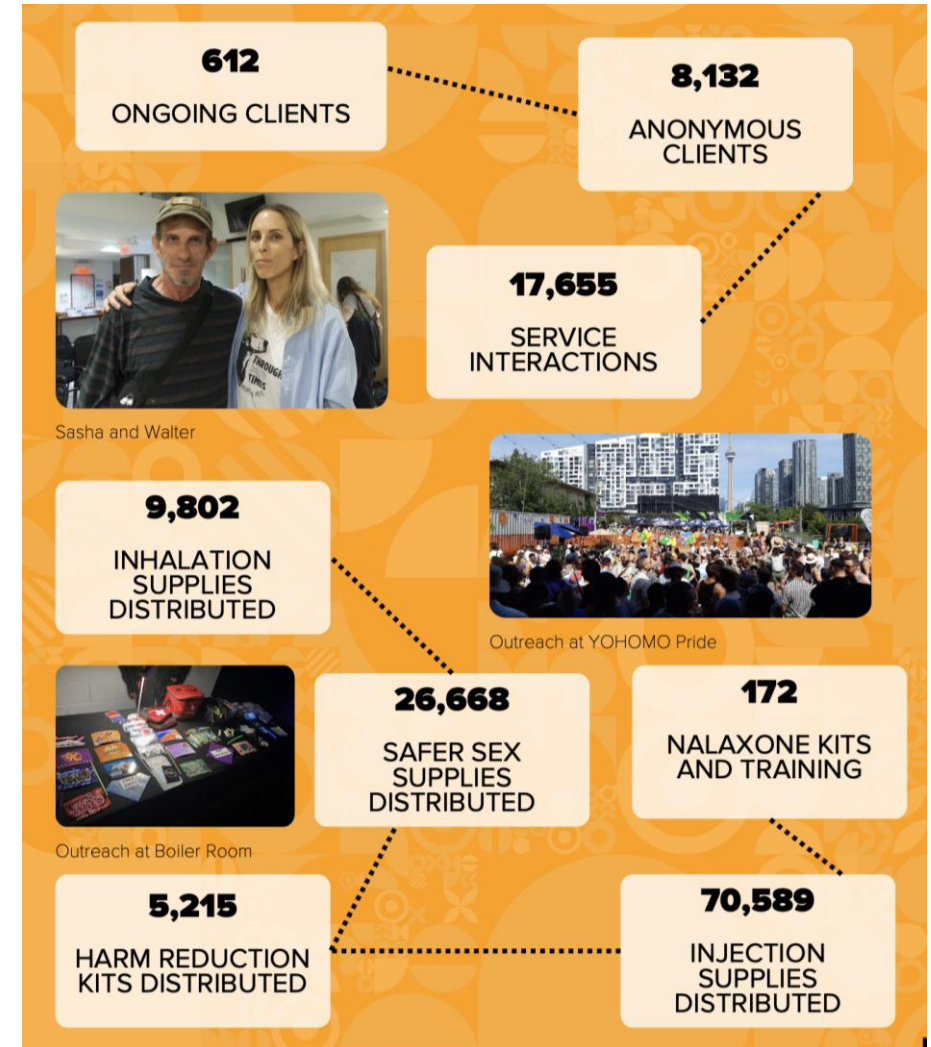
2018 - 2021 Strategic Priorities

- Providing accessible and innovative addictions treatment services that meet individual and community needs.
- Building a sustainable future for addictions services through a focus on partnerships, advocacy, knowledge sharing, communication, and outreach.
- Advancing our capacity for fundraising and funding development in order to sustain and expand addictions services for the community.
- Strengthening and fostering the capacity of our organization and our service teams to continuously deliver positive and measurable outcomes for clients.

Current Programs and Services and 2022-23 Impact

Breakaway Community Services offers a wide range of programs that provide essential support to individuals facing substance use challenges, with a focus on harm reduction, housing stability, and inclusive care for marginalized populations.

- **Harm Reduction Counseling and Support:** This program supports individuals aged 25 and older who use substances and cannot afford to pay for services. It includes counseling, case management, crisis intervention, and access to safer use supplies.
- **Pieces to Pathways (P2P):** A peer-led initiative offering Canada's first substance use support program specifically for LGBTQIA2S+ youth aged 16-29. This program provides harm reduction supplies, case management, individual counseling, and group support.
- **Toronto Opiate Support Team (TOST):** This team provides case management, counseling, and harm reduction services to individuals using opiates across various locations, with a focus on those who have little or no access to other supportive services.
- **Satellite Opioid Treatment:** Community-based outpatient treatment that includes harm reduction approaches such as methadone and suboxone treatments, along with access to food, clothing, hygiene items, and advocacy for housing and employment.
- **Addiction Supportive Housing:** The goal of this program is to increase the health and social wellbeing of people with problematic substance use by providing stable housing and appropriate support services. The program is based on the Housing First Model, which provides supportive housing to people without requirements for engagement in addiction treatment or abstinence.
- **Family and Youth Initiatives:** These initiatives offer outpatient treatment for youth and young adults aged 12-25, including individual and family therapy, harm reduction supplies, and outreach counseling.
- **Through Ruff Times:** A unique program that supports individuals by honoring the relationship between people and their pets, particularly during tough times such as grief and loss.
- **GLoW (Grief, Loss and Wellness) Initiative:** Offers supports to frontline workers, community-facing management and coordinators, and community supporters who have been impacted by the trauma and overwhelming loss of the overdose crisis.



Appendix 3:

Environmental Scan Research Findings

1. The Landscape

Breakaway Community Services offers a wide range of programs that provide essential support to individuals facing substance use challenges, with a focus on harm reduction, housing stability, and inclusive care for marginalized populations. These populations face significant structural barriers in accessing mental health and addiction services, compounded by stigma, socioeconomic disadvantage, and the intersection of multiple identities.



Mental Health and Substance Use

1 in 5 Canadians experience a mental health or addiction problem.⁴¹

In Ontario, people with mental health:

- Have an average income that is only about 60% of the level for those without disabilities.
- Are twice as likely to have low income compared to those without a disability.
- Are twice as likely to have an incidence of Core Housing Need,

33,000 units are estimated as net requirement for existing need, +640 units annually for population growth.⁴⁵

2SLGBTQI+ and Racialized Communities: Marginalized communities, particularly racialized individuals and 2SLGBTQI+ youth, continue to face significant health disparities, compounded by systemic racism and discrimination. These populations often experience higher rates of mental health challenges, homelessness, and barriers to accessing appropriate services.

Youth Mental Health Crisis: Youth in Toronto, particularly marginalized youth, face escalating mental health challenges. These issues are magnified for youth from racialized and 2SLGBTQI+ communities,

There are gaps in mental health and addiction services with limited treatment and pre-treatment beds, and withdrawal management services. The gaps in these services are now even wider in this post COVID-19 pandemic environment.



Housing and Shelters

20% of renters in Toronto experience **extreme affordability problems**, meaning they have low incomes and are spending **more than 50%** of their income on rent.⁷⁰

> 235,000 Canadians experience homelessness annually, costing the economy **\$7 billion**.

> 35,000 Canadians are homeless on any given night.

People experiencing homelessness face higher risks of mental health and substance use disorders.

Shelters and transitional homes are **already at capacity** and report significant **increases in demand**.

5 to 7-year waitlists for supportive housing. People in shelters don't have **appropriate exit strategies**.⁵²



Poverty

The **Toronto region** has the **Highest** cost of living in Canada and the **second highest** housing costs in Canada.

1 in 5 adults and **1 in 4** children live in poverty, with much higher rates among Indigenous, racialized, and newcomer communities.

80% of all single-parent families are headed by women. Their median employment income is **50%** the income of male lone-parent families.⁷¹

Who is Poor in Canada⁷²

- **36%** of all Aboriginal* women
- **22%** of all racialized women
- **31%** of immigrant women
- **23%** of all women with disabilities
- **30%** of all single parent mothers (in comparison to 7% of single parent fathers)
- **16%** of all single senior women

**includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women*

According to a Social Planning Toronto study in 2019, the City of Toronto may be **delayed on several of its targets** under the Poverty Reduction Strategy including the development of new affordable housing units; childcare subsidies and space for low-income families; and reduced TTC fares for low-income residents.⁶³

Individuals experiencing poverty in Toronto include a high proportion of racialized and low-income individuals, who are disproportionately impacted by rising costs of living and food insecurity.

1. The Landscape: Toronto

Significant Population Growth:

Toronto, as the largest city in Canada and the heart of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), continues to experience robust population growth. According to the 2021 Census, Toronto's population reached approximately 2.79 million, representing a growth rate of 2.3% between 2016 and 2021. Although this rate is slightly below the national average of 5.2%, Toronto remains a central hub for new immigrants, a key driver of its growth.

Toronto's growth is also projected to continue, with estimates suggesting the city's population will reach 3.7 million by 2041. Immigration plays a significant role in this trend, as Toronto consistently attracts one of the highest numbers of newcomers to Canada, accounting for almost 45% of all immigrants to Ontario during the past five years.

Immigration and Diversity:

Toronto is renowned for its multiculturalism and diversity. As of 2021, nearly 52% of Toronto's population identified as a visible minority, a reflection of the city's strong immigrant roots. Among the visible minority groups, South Asian (12.6%), Chinese (11.1%), and Black (9.7%) communities are the most represented. Immigration continues to shape the city's demographics, with 47% of Toronto's residents born outside of Canada.

Toronto's immigrant population plays a critical role in its economic and social fabric. However, income disparities between immigrants and non-immigrants remain a challenge. In 2020, the median income of core working-age immigrants in Toronto was approximately \$42,000, compared to \$50,000 for non-immigrants, reflecting the ongoing integration challenges for newcomers.

Age Composition:

Toronto's age distribution reflects both its growth and aging population. Children under 15 make up 14.9% of the population, slightly below the provincial average of 15.8%. The working-age population (ages 15-64) accounts for 67%, a critical segment for the city's economic activity.

However, Toronto's senior population (65 years and older) is also on the rise, making up 16.5% of the city's population, compared to 14.8% in 2016. This aging trend underscores the need for services and infrastructure that cater to older adults, as Toronto grapples with a demographic shift toward an older population.

Income and Employment:

Toronto's economy is diverse, with strong financial services, technology, healthcare, and education sectors. However, income disparities persist across different population segments. While Toronto has a high overall median household income of \$78,378 (2020), visible minority groups, particularly recent immigrants, often face income challenges. South Asian and Black communities, for example, have lower median incomes compared to the general population.

Employment in Toronto continues to be concentrated in professional, technical, and service-oriented industries, attracting a highly educated workforce, but wage gaps remain prevalent, especially for racialized groups.

In summary, Toronto's demographic trends reflect its role as a growing, diverse, and dynamic city. Immigration continues to fuel population growth, contributing to its multicultural fabric, while income disparities and aging trends pose ongoing challenges for the city's future planning and development.

1. The Landscape: BCS Priority Populations

1. People Experiencing Substance Use Challenges

Substance use challenges, particularly opioid dependency, continue to be a significant public health issue in Toronto.

Opioid Use and Overdose: As of 2022, Toronto experienced a sharp rise in opioid-related deaths. Public Health Ontario reported that in 2021, over 591 people in Toronto died from opioid-related overdoses, marking a significant increase from previous years. The majority of these deaths involved fentanyl, a highly potent opioid. Many individuals struggling with opioid dependency are also facing intersecting challenges such as homelessness, mental health disorders, and unemployment.

Demographics: Men are disproportionately represented among those experiencing opioid-related deaths, making up over 70% of cases. The age group most affected by opioid use and overdose is adults aged 25-44. Public health data suggests that marginalized groups, including those experiencing homelessness, racialized communities, and people with mental health disorders, are particularly vulnerable to substance use challenges.

Services and Support: There is a significant demand for harm reduction services, including supervised consumption sites and opioid replacement therapies like methadone and buprenorphine, which have been expanded in Toronto to combat the opioid crisis.

2. 2SLGBTQI+ Youth Aged 16-29: Mental Health Challenges and Homelessness

Mental Health Challenges: 2SLGBTQI+ youth in Toronto are disproportionately affected by mental health challenges compared to their non-2SLGBTQI+ peers. According to Egale Canada, approximately 70% of 2SLGBTQI+ youth aged 16-29 in Canada report experiencing depression and anxiety, with Toronto being a significant area of concern due to its large urban population. These youth face higher levels of discrimination, stigma, and isolation, contributing to their mental health struggles.

Homelessness: According to a 2021 study by HomelessHub.ca, approximately 25-40% of homeless youth in Toronto identify as 2SLGBTQI+. These youth are often at greater risk of homelessness due to family rejection, bullying, and systemic discrimination. Once homeless, they experience high rates of violence, mental health issues, and substance use challenges. The need for supportive housing tailored to 2SLGBTQI+ youth remains critical, with shelters and services like The 519 and Covenant House working to address these gaps.

3. The Intersection of Racialized and Low-Income Communities

Demographics and Income Inequality: Racialized communities in Toronto, particularly Black, South Asian, and Indigenous populations, are disproportionately affected by low income and poverty. The 2021 Census data indicates that over 51% of Toronto's population identifies as a visible minority, but these communities experience systemic barriers that affect their economic wellbeing. According to the City of Toronto's 2021 Vital Signs report, racialized groups in Toronto are twice as likely to live in poverty compared to their non-racialized counterparts.

Income Disparity: In Toronto, the median after-tax income for racialized individuals is significantly lower than for non-racialized residents. For example, Black Torontonians had a median after-tax income of \$38,000, compared to \$55,000 for the non-racialized population. This economic disparity leads to higher levels of housing insecurity, food insecurity, and reliance on social services.

Health and Social Disparities: Racialized communities also face disproportionate mental health and physical health challenges. Many of these issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit low-income and racialized populations harder due to pre-existing inequities in access to healthcare, employment, and housing.

4. People Experiencing Homelessness or Housing Insecurity

Homeless Population: Toronto has one of the largest homeless populations in Canada. According to the 2021 Street Needs Assessment, over 7,300 individuals were experiencing homelessness in Toronto on any given night. This number has been steadily increasing due to factors such as rising housing costs, the opioid crisis, and the impacts of COVID-19.

Demographics: Homelessness in Toronto disproportionately affects certain groups:

- **Indigenous Peoples:** Despite making up less than 1% of the city's population, Indigenous individuals represent 15% of Toronto's homeless population.
- **Racialized Communities:** Over 50% of individuals experiencing homelessness in Toronto identify as racialized, with Black and Indigenous populations being overrepresented.
- **Families and Women:** Families, particularly single-parent households (most often led by women), and women fleeing domestic violence, are a growing segment of the homeless population.

Housing Insecurity: Many Torontonians are facing severe housing insecurity, driven by skyrocketing rents and a lack of affordable housing. As of 2022, nearly 100,000 households were on the waitlist for affordable housing in Toronto. The city's vacancy rate remains low, and the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment is over \$2,000 per month, far out of reach for many low-income families and individuals.

1. The Landscape: Public Policy and Public Perception in Ontario; System Transformation

Harm reduction has recently been a topic of contentious debate, particularly when it came to the presence and location of safe consumption sites. Most recently, Ontario revised its legislation and policy to restrict consumption sites being located within 200 metres of schools and childcare centres. Ten (10) supervised consumption sites will need to be closed and/or relocated and impacting the location of future sites.

This unfortunately has created stigmatization and a “not in my backyard” sentiment amongst the general public towards not having mental health and addictions services provided in their neighbourhoods, as they mistakenly believe that having mental health and addiction organizations in their neighborhoods would pose safety risks. As a result, there continues to be hesitation in expanding and implementing other harm reduction strategies outside of safe consumption sites.

One of the major developments is the introduction of 19 new addiction treatment hubs (HART Hubs) funded with \$378 million. These hubs are designed to offer comprehensive care, including addiction treatment, mental health support, and housing, aiming to provide an integrated solution to addiction and homelessness issues. The hubs will open before the closure of 10 supervised consumption sites, a move that has generated concern among advocates who warn that the closure of these sites could lead to an increase in overdose deaths if the transition is not managed carefully.

Additionally, the Ontario government has committed to stopping the opening of new supervised consumption sites, citing rising crime and community concerns. However, many advocates, including the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), have expressed concerns about this decision. They stress that harm reduction services, including safe consumption sites, are crucial for saving lives and reducing stigma around substance use. CMHA has urged the government to maintain harm reduction elements as part of the broader addiction recovery strategy.

These changes reflect a shift towards a recovery-focused model but highlight ongoing debates about the balance between harm reduction and long-term treatment strategies in addressing the opioid crisis.

What is BCSs role in the broader HR Sector related to this shift in public policy and public perception? What opportunities are there to collaborate with peer agencies on advocacy efforts? What is the role for BHS in HART Hubs?

1. The Landscape: Harm Reduction in Ontario

In 2024, harm reduction services in Ontario and across Canada are continuing to evolve, driven by ongoing public health crises, particularly the opioid epidemic. Here are key harm reduction trends:

1. Expansion of Safe Supply Programs

Safe supply programs, which provide individuals with safer alternatives to street drugs, continue to expand across Canada. These programs are designed to reduce overdose deaths from toxic drugs and are increasingly seen as a necessary part of harm reduction efforts. Ontario, as well as other provinces like British Columbia, are seeing more resources allocated to these programs in response to the rising overdose crisis

2. Increased Investment in Integrated Hubs for Addiction Treatment

Ontario is introducing new integrated addiction recovery hubs (HART Hubs) to provide comprehensive services, including mental health support, housing, and addiction treatment. This shift marks a significant move towards integrating harm reduction within broader healthcare and social services frameworks. These hubs are aimed at filling service gaps as the province phases out some supervised consumption sites

3. Closure of Supervised Consumption Sites

Despite the known benefits of supervised consumption sites in reducing overdose deaths, Ontario has announced the closure of several such sites by March 2025. This decision has been met with criticism from harm reduction advocates who argue that these sites save lives and reduce strain on emergency services. The closures have raised concerns about a gap in harm reduction services during the transition to the new recovery hubs.

4. Focus on Harm Reduction in Employment Sectors

There is increasing awareness of the opioid crisis in high-risk employment sectors, such as construction and mining. Harm reduction strategies, including naloxone training and safe supply programs, are being integrated into workplace safety protocols to address the high rates of opioid-related deaths in these industries

5. Indigenous-Led Harm Reduction Initiatives

In 2024, there is growing recognition of the need for culturally safe, Indigenous-led harm reduction programs. These initiatives are designed to address the unique challenges faced by Indigenous communities, who are disproportionately affected by substance use disorders. Indigenous-led programs integrate traditional healing practices with modern harm reduction strategies, providing a holistic approach to substance use

6. Decriminalization Advocacy

While not fully implemented across Canada, there is ongoing advocacy for the decriminalization of drug possession for personal use, particularly following British Columbia's pilot project. Harm reduction organizations argue that decriminalization would reduce stigma, improve access to services, and address the root causes of substance use.

These trends highlight a shift towards integrating harm reduction into broader healthcare and social services, with a focus on reducing stigma, improving access to safer substances, and expanding naloxone distribution and training across various sectors. However, **debates around the closure of supervised consumption sites and the need for culturally specific services continue to shape harm reduction strategies in Ontario and Canada.**

strategisense

www.strategisense.com