Improving the Diagnostic Journey:

Toward More Accessible and Higher-Quality Services

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A Crucial Step in Accessing Support

The diagnostic evaluation of children with neurodevelopmental conditions is a crucial step, as it determines access to support and intervention services. However, in Quebec, many challenges remain in terms of accessibility, quality, and efficiency of the services offered. Faced with fragmented services and long wait times, the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MSSS) tasked researchers Dr. Claudine Jacques and Dr. Mélina Rivard with designing a logical model for a service trajectory aimed at optimizing the diagnostic journey for children aged 0 to 7.

A More Structured Diagnostic Pathway

Lead researchers Dr. Claudine Jacques and Dr. Mélina Rivard, in collaboration with Ms. Élodie Hérault,

Dr. Nadia Abouzeid, and Ms. Geneviève Saulnier, worked alongside a project manager from the MSSS and an advisory committee composed of professionals and physicians (including a speech-language pathologist, pediatrician, psychiatrist, psychoeducator, and psychologist) to develop a reference logical model guiding the delivery of services. The model was initially built using existing research to address gaps in the current system and ensure it is grounded in evidence-based practices. It also integrated the experiences of parents, health professionals, and researchers to ensure that interventions and resources are tailored to the real-life contexts of families and professionals.

The primary goal of the **logical model** is to provide a seamless, accessible, and high-quality service trajectory that facilitates the care of young children with neurodevelopmental conditions in Quebec.

The model is based on several key recommendations, including:

- **Service Integration:** Rather than treating diagnostic evaluation as a standalone step, it should be part of a continuum—from screening to intervention—to

ensure timely follow-up for children in need of support.

- **Improved Professional Support:** Ongoing training and support for teams are essential to ensure accurate diagnoses and appropriate care.

- **Equitable Access to Services:** It is critical to reduce disparities in access and to offer diagnostic services tailored to each child, regardless of their profile or age.

The Essential Role of Families

The logical model also highlights the importance of family involvement, recognizing that families play a crucial role in the diagnostic process for neurodevelopmental conditions. Parents are viewed as full partners in the process. Their active participation helps refine the diagnosis and adapt recommendations to the child's specific needs.

That said, the diagnostic process can be complex and emotionally taxing for parents. In this context, the proposed model recommends the presence of a *key support worker* to guide families throughout the process. This person would be available to answer questions, provide support, and help families navigate the service system. Improved access to clear and relevant information would also help parents better understand the diagnosis and take the necessary steps to support their child. This would address a major issue: the lack of accessible, easy-to-understand information for parents.

Ongoing Evaluation for Continuous Improvement

Given the goal of the logical model—to improve the diagnostic journey for children with neurodevelop-

mental conditions—it is vital to assess the model's reach and impact to adequately address the issue. The model therefore includes mechanisms for continuous evaluation, allowing practices to be adjusted according to the real needs of families and professionals. This approach would help optimize service effectiveness and ensure the model remains flexible and responsive over time.

Additionally, the model emphasizes the need to implement measures to evaluate the quality of its implementation across different institutions, as well as the impact of its application (e.g., reduction in wait times and improved follow-up quality after diagnosis). These regular evaluations would ensure ongoing improvement of the process and allow for adaptation to observed realities.

Toward Higher-Quality Diagnostic Services

By integrating these recommendations, the diagnostic process could become more efficient, reducing wait times and improving the experience for families. This logical model represents a key resource that will be used by the MSSS to develop a province-wide framework, ensuring every child has access to high-quality services at the right time and tailored to their specific needs.

Ultimately, implementing this model would not only better meet the needs of children and their families but also support a more structured and supportive work environment for health professionals. By focusing on better organization and more streamlined services, Quebec could build a more effective and inclusive diagnostic system.

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Original reference:
Hérault, E., Rivard, M., Jacques, C., Abouzeid, N. et Saulnier, G. (2022). *Développement d'un modèle logique de trajectoire de services en évaluation diagnostique pour les enfants âgés de 0 à 7 ans chez qui l'on soupçonne un trouble neurodéveloppemental.* Laboratoire sur l'unicité et la diversité des intérêts et des comportements en autisme (LUDI-CA). https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/4631951