Author’s response to reviews

Title: Move the North: Evaluation of a regional stakeholder engagement initiative to support the development of a community-partnered physical activity research agenda

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Author’s response to reviews:

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Dear Editors and Reviewers,

We thank the reviewers for their time and thoughtful comments on our manuscript. We are also grateful for the opportunity to revise this work for publication in Research Involvement & Engagement.

Below I have provided a response to each comment from the reviewers. I have also attached a copy of the manuscript with changes highlighted, and a clean version.
Response to Reviewers:

Reviewer #1: This is an interesting topic on stakeholder engagement initiative. However, the following will need further clarification:

1. The information gap is clearly identified and supported by local setting data. However, appropriate citations from literature will justify and add to the clarity of the implementation strategy and process.

Thank you for your comments and suggestions. We have referred to several patient engagement frameworks in the background to support the justification for this paper and the methods. These include the International Association for Public Participation Spectrum (IAP2) and Patient Engagement Framework from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. This issue is further addressed in our response to the next question.

2. Addition of a conceptual model, framework or theoretical grounding linking to the study objectives, hypotheses, and measures will also contribute towards the rationale of this project.

The evaluation of this project was based on the evaluation process and criteria proposed by Esmail et al., 2015. This project is also based on theoretical principles outlined in frameworks for integrated knowledge translation and implementation.

We have added the following statement to the introduction (line 163 – 166):
Foundational relationship building, pre-formative collaborative work, and knowledge sharing and exchange are key components of the framework for collaborative research proposed by Rycroft-Malone and colleagues (20) and understanding knowledge in the local context is a key element in the Knowledge to Action Cycle of implementation (21).

3. The stakeholders, the team, implementation strategy and process are well described but the potential implementation barriers are not clearly described.

Thank you for this observation. In the lessons learned section, we have described several takeaways for our team moving forward and for others who may be interested in hosting similar events. We have broadened this discussion with this additional paragraph (line 419-425):

There are also several barriers in the implementation of this initiative to note. At the meeting participant level, these included competing work commitments, travel distance, and cost. We tried to minimize these barriers by running the event in the fall when weather is more appropriate for travel, and hosting the event in a geographically central location. We recognize that there is likely no ideal time or location for everyone. At the organizing team level, barriers to the implementation of this event included some similarities such as competing work obligations, the interpersonal skills required to form relationships, and facilitation skills in conducting the actual event.

Reviewer #2:

1. Why did the authors have no members of the public on the project team or as co-facilitators for the breakout groups.

We agree that not having a patient or community member partner on the project team is a limitation and has been mentioned in the limitations section, line 469-472. We will highlight that the objective of this project was to enable our team of researchers and knowledge-users to build a network of community members and identify research priorities, so that in the future we have established relationships with community members to invite them to join our team. The breakout groups were each led by two people, one was someone with topic or facilitative expertise, the
other was a community champion in our existing network. We have expanded on in the limitations section line 475-477 with the addition sentence:

Inviting a community member to co-facilitate breakout groups may have also added a unique perspective to the event and addressed some identified communication barriers.

We have also clarified the skill set of the facilitators (line 273 – 275):

One of the session facilitators was someone with topic or facilitator expertise and the other was a community physical activity champion known to the project team.

2. Did the authors attempt to collate the reasons for the non attendance of 24 people for the research agenda development workshop and for the non attendance of 91 people (50%) for the physical activity summit.

We did not attempt to contact people who did not respond to the invitation emails or who did not attend the meeting. Although we did receive some responses from people who were unable to attend due to conflicting obligations, we have not presented this as it was a small number and not collected in a systematic way. This would have added an interesting layer to our evaluation and recruitment strategy, and we have added it to the limitations section of the manuscript, line 488-493:

Finally, we did not attempt to contact individuals who were invited and chose not to attend the event. We did receive a small number of responses from people who were unable to attend due to time conflicts or other work obligations, however this data was not collected in a systematic way and has not been reported. This process would be challenging and likely face a high number of non-responders, but this information may have been useful for researchers planning similar events.

3. What strategies, if any, did the authors employ to improve diversity, bearing in mind that this one of the key objectives of the project.
Our invitation list for the Summit and Research Workshop was developed based on representation targets, or lenses, that was intended to guide diversity at the event. As people registered for the event, we constantly checked back to our targets and purposively invited additional people as required to ensure appropriate representation. The categories are listed in Table 1 and presented as groups of people (based on sector) invited and who attended.

We have expanded this explanation in the methods section, line 226-231:

To ensure appropriate representation at the event, we created a list of the different lenses (e.g., geographic regions, levels of government, community services, not-for-profit special interest groups) we wanted represented at the meeting and brainstormed a list of individuals in different organizations to fit these targets. As invitees registered for the event or responded to invitations, we referred back to our targets and sent purposeful invitations as required to support our diversity targets.

4. Did the authors identify any learning or support needs for the public attendees.

Thank you for this suggestion. We did not identify learning needs of attendees, but agree some may have found it helpful. We have expanded on this idea in the lessons learned section, line 450-459:

Thirdly, identifying background knowledge and developing learning supports for attendees may have helped to make the information presented more accessible to members of the public. Providing a glossary of key terms, common acronyms, and technical jargon are potential strategies for this language barrier. Another option would be to develop a plain language communication guide for all presenters and group facilitators. To gauge learning needs, the pre-meeting survey could include questions about what people would need to support engagement, or terms that we anticipated would be part of the conversation that community members may not be familiar with. Providing training for patient and public research partners, potentially using resources such as those provided in the BC SUPPORT Unit Foundations in Patient-Oriented Research Course (31), may also facilitate participation.
5. Were people without internet access disadvantaged in the project.

This is a good point. It is possible that people without internet access would have been disadvantaged from attending because we circulated invitations via email. As mentioned in the limitations section, this method of recruitment did impose certain limitations. We have expanded this section to include the following (line 446-448):

It is also possible that individuals without internet access, which is more common in northern and rural areas, faced disadvantages participating in this event.

6. Was consideration given to the provision of a glossary of technical terms for the public attendees.

As above, we have addressed this suggestion in the lessons learned section (line 450-459):

Thirdly, identifying background knowledge and developing what supports might be needed by attendees would have helped to make the information presented more accessible to members of the public. Providing a glossary of key terms, common acronyms, and technical jargon are potential strategies for this language barrier. Another option would be to develop a plain language communication guide for all presenters and group facilitators. To gauge learning needs, the pre-meeting survey could include questions about what people would need to support engagement, or a list of terms that we anticipated would be part of the conversation that community members may not be familiar with. Providing training for patient and public research partners, potentially using resources such as those provided in the BC SUPPORT Unit Foundations in Patient-Oriented Research Course (31), may also facilitate participation.

Reviewer #3: I am writing my review as a member of the public.
The topic of evaluation is of interest to me and also that this particular research centred on lack of physical activity which is of concern and affecting health. The paper is well-written and raises many important points.

I feel that a lot of thought has been given to setting up the study: survey beforehand, how to engage with the various groups, ensure a good mix of people. It is good to read that there were positive impressions of the event. I note that certain populations were limited in numbers in the study, which seems to be a common theme in research. The paper highlighted important points including establishing authentic relationships, the need for ongoing support and follow-up.

It was good to see that the workshops took place over two days and that participants’ comments have been noted about sessions being heavy with content and suggestions for improvement "more movement breaks" and reminder to avoid acronyms and jargon, the importance to balance the sessions and include networking and social time.

I was pleased to read about plans for biannual events and to ask delegates to say something about their experience, I feel that this is important.

It was also good to read that advice to others for their research are that they should consider finance and admin support (payment upfront and reimbursement due to Institute policies created barriers for participants). A website might be useful to consider, rather than emails. A higher need of facilitation at small groups, aided with a template. There was also the comment that the study should have included a community member/patient on team at the start, which I feel is an important point.

The researchers have taken on-board comments about need to strive for greater inclusion, more movement breaks, clarify expectations for smaller breakout groups.

The tables were very good, I was interested to see the agenda for both days. I also found Figures 1 - 3 very useful.
RESPONSE - Thank you for your thoughtful comments and for taking the time to review this manuscript. Your perspective as a member of the public is important and we are glad you found value in our work.

Reviewer #4: General Comments

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to read this paper.

The paper is interesting. However, it also raises multiple questions and concerns. Too often the claims about the success of the engagement and the representativeness of the stakeholders seem to be out of synch with the methodology, data collected and results. Especially as throughout the paper so much emphasis was put on representativeness and the underrepresented, it is disturbing not to know the actual number of stakeholders by category and their demographics. This probably represents the main weakness of the paper. After a second reading of the results and the limitations, it seems like the paper was written as a secondary analysis of the stakeholder engagement initiative (i.e., it was not planned from the outset). It would be relevant to mention it if it is the case, as it will alleviate somewhat the expectations towards the evaluation of the event/study. That being said, the paper is interesting and even if it is less successful in the end than it is claimed, it may still provide insight for the Research Involvement and Engagement community.

RESPONSE - Thank you for your comments and for taking the time to review our paper.

We did plan to evaluate this even from the early stages of planning (as described in the methods under ‘evaluation of stakeholder engagement’, line 281). At that time, although we identified the importance of representation in terms of sectors, organizations, and roles being, we also determined that it would be inappropriate to collect demographic data beyond this. This was both a pragmatic decision and because the objectives of our meeting were not dependent on demographic information such as age and gender but rather the perspectives and lenses each person contributed to the event based on their paid or volunteer work. Your point is well made and appreciated and we have addressed this limitation at several points in the revised manuscript, which are detailed in response to your specific comments, below.
Specific Comments

1. p.5 L109 I would refrain from using "believed" in such context, especially as the value of PER is debated and speculative. Also, please support that with refs; unless you state that it is you (the authors) that hold such belief.

We have revised this sentence (line 109-111), as follows:

It is generally accepted that patient and public engagement in health research contributes to more relevant, actionable, impactful, and accountable research, ultimately improving health outcomes (1).

2. p.5 L124+ Please contextualize in this paragraph what are the stages during which patients are more often involved (i.e., early and late stages rather than over the course of a research project).

We have added an additional sentence in this paragraph to reflect this (line 127 – 129):

Patient and public engagement in research is most common in the early stages of research to support agenda setting and priority development, with less engagement at later stages of the research process (4,8).

3. p.7 L167 The total number of stakeholders needs to be indicated in the first paragraph of the Methods.

We have revised this paragraph to includes the following sentence, line 180 - 183:
In total, there were at least 95 stakeholders engaged over the two-day event, 36 at the Research Agenda Development Workshop (Day 1) and 91 at the Physical Activity Summit (Day 2), with the majority of attendees participating in both days of the event.

4. p.7 L170 The language makes it unclear whether patients were part of Day 1, if it's not the case please explain why.

To help with clarity, we have revised this sentence to simply describe the objectives of the day, as we have described who attended in a later section. This sentence (line 177-178), now states:

The first day was a Research Agenda Development Workshop and focused on identifying research priorities.

5. p.9 L202 Please clarify and describe what kind of compensation was offered to Community member/patient partners (as well as the rules for accessing the bursary program).

We did not offer community members attending the event compensation for attending, although there was no cost for anyone to attend the meeting (lunch and snacks were also included). To apply for the bursary program, attendees were invited to indicate if they required financial support on the pre-meeting/registration survey. Anyone was welcome to apply, however due to limited funding, decisions about funding were based on need and were adjudicated by three team members (CP, GFox, RK). We offered reimbursement up to $500 including mileage, accommodation, and/or a flight. We were able to support 6 community members to attend and did not have to deny anyone funding support.

We have added additional information about the bursary program in the methods section (line 245-250):

Bursary Program

After completing the registration, participants were given the option to apply for a travel bursary. Anyone was welcome to apply for this support; however, due to a limited amount of funding, it
was clearly stated that decisions would be based on identified need and lack of access to additional resources. Funding was offered in the form of reimbursement of travel expenses up to $500. Applications were adjudicated by three team members (CP, GFox, RK).

and the results section (line 315-317), copied below:

We were able to support at least 6 community members (some people indicated they were organizing carpools) to attend the meeting from our bursary program and did not need to deny support to anyone who asked for it.

6. p.9 L218 Please clarify your expectations of appropriate representation

This section has been expanded as follows (line 226-231):

To ensure appropriate representation at the event, we created a list of the different lenses (e.g., geographic regions, levels of government, community services, not-for-profit special interest groups) we wanted represented at the meeting and brainstormed a list of individuals in different organizations to fit these targets. As invitees registered for the event or responded to invitations, we referred back to our targets and sent purposeful invitations as required to support our diversity targets.

7. p.9 L220 In Table 1, it is unclear the distinction between Community member and Community member/patient partners?

This has been changed to just “community member” in both columns.

8. Also the numbers of participants per category would be much more helpful than binary Y/N. It is disturbing not to know at this point of the paper, the actual number of stakeholders by category and their demographics (as well as to understand how many participants were invited for Day 1 and 2).
We do agree that reporting the actual number of people in each category would provide additional information to support our diversity targets, however, we have decided not to do so for several reasons. First, there are cases where people would be classified in more than one category (e.g., based on geographic location and role in community) and this would be difficult to classify in a tabular form. Second, in the many small communities of northern BC and given the relatively few people doing this work in the region, we are hesitant to provide more detailed information as we do not want to increase the risk of people being identified as a participant, as we did not explicitly seek consent for this and are cognizant of anonymity. Finally, we did not feel more demographic information was necessary as this was structured as a program evaluation rather than a research project and we did not want to collect more personal information from participants than was necessary.

We have expanded the note for this table to describe what we mean by “limited”:

Note: Limited is used to denote a smaller number of attendees in the respective category than anticipated (e.g. 1 or 2) based on the size of the sector or number of people invited.

9. Table 1 is hard to read; I would suggest reformatting it.

Table 1 has been reformatted (page 24).

10. p.10 L226 Would you consider adding all materials (such as the pre-meeting survey) in Supplement Files, so that the research community could benefit from your work?

Thank you for this suggestion, we will include both the pre-meeting and post-meeting evaluation surveys as supplementary files, this has been added to the text.

11. p.10 L227 In addition to provincial privacy regulations, did the respondents signed an informed consent to comply with Canadian research ethics guidance? If so, please mention it. If not, please justify why.
Based on assessment of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2), this project would be classified as a program evaluation, and is thus not considered research and exempt from needed approval from the research ethics board. Also of note in these guidelines is that publication in a journal is not to be considered as a factor dictating if ethics approval is needed. The intent of this analysis and paper is assessment and improvement purposes and does not answer a specific research question with disciplined inquiry (defined as research in the TCPS2, http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-epc2/chapter2-chapitre2/).

We have made every effort to respect the privacy of attendees at this event and that has guided our reporting and what personal information was collected from attendees.

We have added this justification to the under ethics approval (line 516-518):

This project is a program evaluation and ethics approval is not required as described in the Tri-Council Policy Statement, Chapter 2: Scope and Approach.

12. p.10 L228 Since you detailed the timeline for the save the date, it would only be coherent to add when the pre-meeting survey was sent.

This information has been clarified, line 235:

Save the date notices were sent approximately 4 months prior to the event (June 15, 2018) and full invitations along with a pre-meeting survey and registration were sent approximately 6-weeks prior (September 5, 2018).

13. p.10 L236 This paragraph raises many questions that may be resolved if the survey was available to readers.
As mentioned previously, the pre-meeting survey for each day will be available as a supplementary file.

14. p.10 L236 Consider moving this paragraph in the previous section as (unless I am mistaken) it did not happen during Day 1.

This describes the pre-meeting survey for Day 1. There were different surveys for Day 1 and 2. This has been clarified in the previous section (as mentioned above) and the surveys will be available as a supplementary file to reduce confusion.

15. p.10 L238 Please mention the three themes.

This sentence has been revised as follows (line 255-258):

Responses were analyzed to identify three theme areas: Equity, Cultural Shift, Surveillance & Data. These themes were used to identify breakout groups and the development of the research agenda. During the meeting, attendees were asked to divide into breakout groups and identify research priorities with a timeline for completion.

16. p.11 L261 Criteria for representativeness should be presented before (i.e, p.9 L218)

We have added additional information about the representation targets earlier in the methods section, under meeting invites. This section now reads (line 226-231):

To ensure appropriate representation at the event, we created a list of the different lenses (eg, geographic regions, levels of government, community services, not-for-profit special interest groups) we wanted represented at the meeting and brainstormed a list of individuals in different organizations to fit these targets. As invitees registered for the event or responded to invitations, we referred back to our targets and sent purposeful invitations as required to support our diversity targets.
17. p.12 L287 "We were 287 moderately successful in our representation targets" This statement on its own is really insufficient given the importance of representativeness throughout the paper.

This sentence has been revised to be more reflective of a results section and not to offer any interpretation. It now reads (line 310-313):

Success at meeting our representation targets are presented in Table 1. There was limited representation from Indigenous organizations, the education sector, the private sector, and new Canadians or immigrant population.

18. p.13 L293 The methodology of the post-meeting survey would require much more clarity. Are Figures 2 and 3 reporting the results for the 2-days? If so, this seems strange as the aims and populations of the 2 days are quite different. As is the results seem misleading. Results should be presented in a much more granular way and by broad category. A focus on the perspectives from the Community member/patient partners is crucial, if not it is really difficult to assess the success of engaging them.

Figure 2 presents the results of the Likert-scale questions from Day 1 and Figure 3 presents the results from day 2. Table 4 presents the open-ended questions for both days, separated by headings. This has been clarified (line 320-321):

Responses from the post-meeting evaluation survey are summarized in Figure 2 (Day 1), Figure 3 (Day 2), and Table 4 (open-ended questions for both days).

We did not ask people to identify their sector/role when completing the post-meeting survey and are unable to report results based on category. This has been added in the limitations section (line 481-484):
As attendees were not asked to identify their sector or role in the post-meeting survey, we are unable to identify specific engagement outcomes or satisfaction with the event based on our diversity targets or more detailed demographic information.

19. p.14 L323 This "report". Do you mean article/paper?

This has been changed to “paper”.

20. p.14 L324 Given the lack of granularity of demographics and of the results the paper cannot say the following: "Overall, this 2-day community engagement event was successful in engaging with a multi-sector group of stakeholders from typically underrepresented communities across a broad geographic region".

Although we agree that the lack of more detailed demographic information limits the conclusions that can be made based on representation, we would argue that our event was successful at meeting our stated project objectives and that people who attended the event felt like it was a good use of time and was successful. We have revised this sentence slightly as follows (line 349-351):

Overall, this 2-day community engagement event included a multi-sector group of stakeholders from typically underrepresented communities across a broad geographic region.

21. p.14 L328 The paper does not provide enough information to justify the following statement: "Our evaluation has revealed that we were successful at meeting our objectives, although there remain some gaps in our representation targets."

We have clarified this sentence to reflect that we were successful in meeting our project objectives (e.g. developed research priorities), but acknowledges that there were gaps in our representation targets based on what was collected. Revised sentence as follows (line 353-355):
Our evaluation has revealed that we were successful at meeting our project objectives to identify research priorities and a community-informed research agenda, although there were gaps in our representation targets.

22. p.14 L334 Please specify for the readers the implication of each level.

The stages of the IAP2 spectrum have been elaborated with the following sentence (line 359-362):

This distinction reflects our team working directly with community members, understanding community-specific (or community level) concerns and issues, and seeking feedback on final materials developed based on the engagement activity to confirm contributions were reflected in the final research agenda and steps for action (4).

23. p.14 L339 Could you please explain how the relationships and connections are expected to be maintained and nurtured?

We have added additional information to this paragraph to reflect a recently created monthly newsletter circulated from our team. As mentioned elsewhere in the discussion, we plan to host biannual physical activity summits and engage with community members in research opportunities moving forward. Our team also regularly provides content expertise and consults on various physical activity related projects in the region.

We have added the following sentences to this section (line 368-374):

As part of our commitment to relationship building, we have established a monthly “Physical Activity Update” newsletter that is circulated to all meeting attendees and others who have expressed interest in our network. This newsletter presents funding opportunities, relevant community events, and provides informational resources to support physical activity in communities. Our team also regularly provides content expertise, supports, and consults on various physical activity related projects in the region to support evaluation and implementation.
24. p.15 L357 How did the community members in attendance expressed their needs? Please clarify.

We have clarified this paragraph to indicate this information was provided in the post-meeting evaluation (line 389).

25. p.16 L365 "Based on our representation targets, we were able to deliver a reasonably inclusive event." The whole paragraph seems to contradict previous claims of success. This limitation should have been mentioned earlier!

We have provided additional contextual information to justify this statement and it has been revised as follows (line 399-400):

Based on our representation targets, we were able to deliver a reasonably inclusive event as nearly every sector in our original plan was included.

26. p.17 L384 "Lessons Learned" is really interesting and would benefit from being further developed considering the limitations of the study and data collection.

Thank you, we agree that this type of discussion is beneficial. We have elaborated on several points in this section and hope it assists other research teams with similar events (line 428 – 466).

27. p.17 L393 Reimbursement process is indeed a really important concern.

Thank you, we agree and plan to work with our institutional financial officers to better support community members in future events and meetings.
28. Given the limitations and the lack of demographics, please refrain from unilaterally stating that the event was successful (i.e., "This 2-day community engagement event was successful in reaching a wide range of community members from a broad and geographically diverse region." This statement is difficult to hold and require more justification.)

We have provided further contextual information to this sentence to indicate that it was successful based on our pre-determined criteria and overall project objectives, as below (498-500):

Based on pre-established diversity targets, this 2-day community engagement event met pre-determined objectives and reached a wide range of community members from a broad and geographically diverse region.

29. Unless it is due to the system upload, please provide a better quality for the figures.

Figure 2 and 3, please indicate that it is expressed in %. Also, did all participants responded to every question (i.e., Is the n the same for all questions?)

We have clarified this information in the Note for each figure (line 599-600 and 603-604 in text):

Note: Each bar represents % of total responses. Total number of responses = 18 for each question.

Note: Each bar represents % of total responses. Total number of responses = 46 for each question.

30. Could you please identify clearly where is Prince George in Figure 1? This would give a better idea of the geographical considerations of hosting the event there.

We have circled Prince George on the map. We have also added more contextual information about Prince George BC in the following sentences (line 174-178):
This stakeholder engagement event was held over 2-days in October 2018 in Prince George, BC, a northern and isolated medium population centre of approximately 78,675 people (22) and the unofficial capital of northern BC. Prince George is located on the traditional unceded territory of the Lheidli T’enneh peoples.