

The Future is Already Here: Scenario Planning as a Tool for Strategic Foresight



BACKGROUND In 2010, the Chief Public Health Officer asked the Ministerial Advisory Council (MAC) on the Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada to provide its thinking on the future of HIV/AIDS. The MAC commissioned San Patten and Associates, Inc. to develop a Foresight Document on the future of HIV/AIDS in Canada over the next 25 years as a basis for long term HIV/AIDS policy advice.

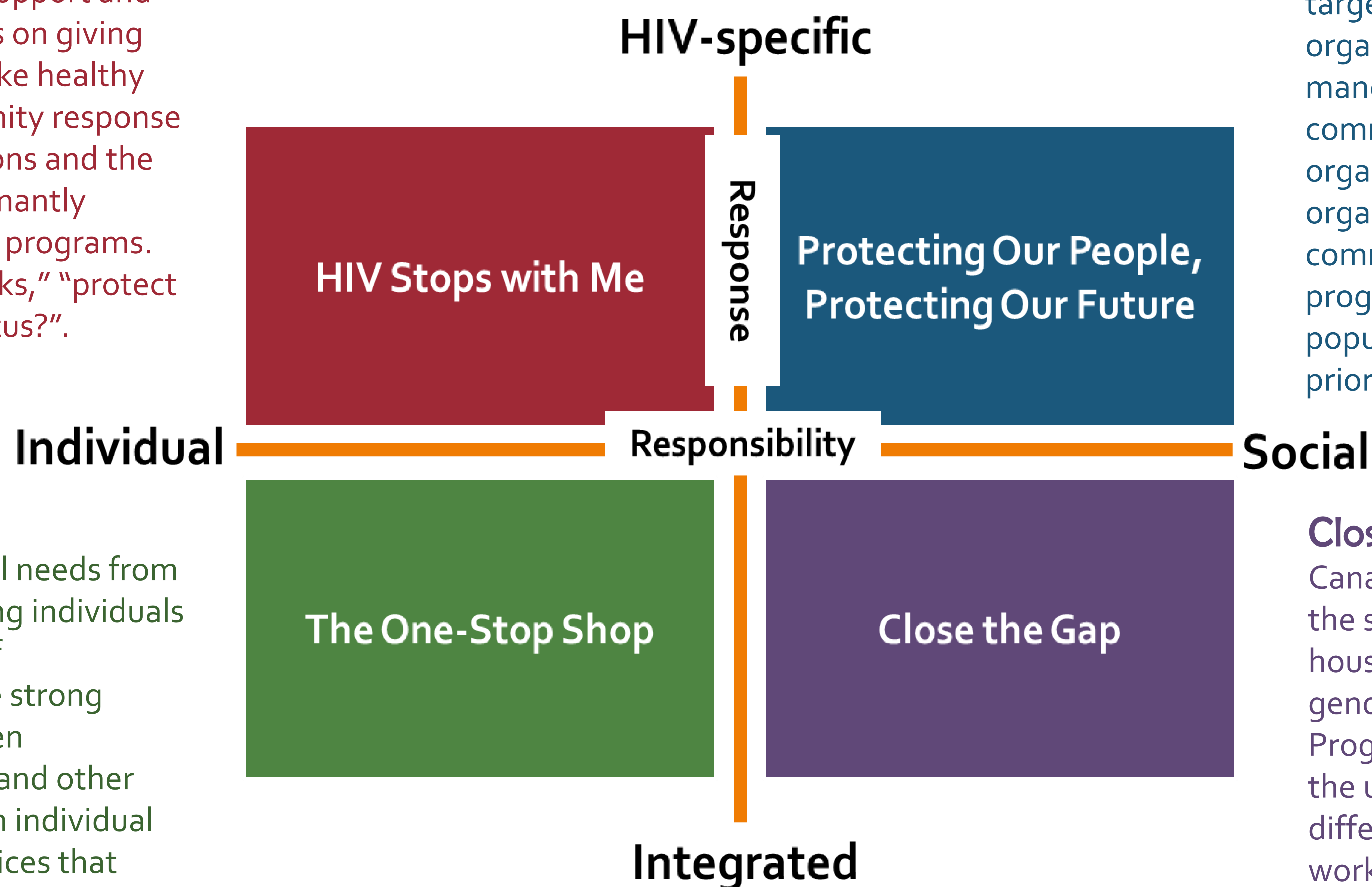
Scenario planning is a technique used for long-term strategic analysis and planning. Scenarios are narratives that describe how the world might look in the future if certain trends were to strengthen or diminish, or if various policy choices are made.

HIV Stops With Me

Policies and services are focused on meeting individual HIV prevention, care, support and treatment needs. The emphasis is on giving people the tools they need to make healthy decisions or actions. The community response is led by AIDS Service Organizations and the government response is predominantly through HIV-specific funding and programs. Messages include: "know your risks," "protect yourself", "do you know your status?".

The One-Stop Shop

The focus is on meeting individual needs from a holistic perspective, and assisting individuals with their needs across a range of determinants of health. There are strong partnerships and referrals between community-based organizations and other agencies. The goal is ideally for an individual to have access to "one-stop" services that meet all of their social and health needs, with a seamless referral process. The person is at the centre of the network of services that are set up to meet their broad range of individual needs.



Protecting Our People, Protecting Our Future

Community development interventions target communities most at risk. The organizations responding to HIV have a mandate to work directly within these communities (e.g., immigrant-serving organizations, gay men's health organizations, ethno-cultural community organizations). Funding programs are HIV-specific, using a population-based approach that prioritizes communities at highest risk.

Close the Gap

Canada's approach to HIV is to address the social determinants of health: housing, poverty, income security, gender inequities or homophobia. Programs and policies seek to change the underlying causes of HIV for different populations. This involves working in broad coalitions with many other stakeholders, in cross-cutting themes. Services take the form of health promotion and prevention initiatives that respond to the needs of vulnerable populations.

**The future is already here;
it is just unevenly distributed.**

- William Gibson (science fiction writer)

METHODOLOGY The Foresight Document was developed through an iterative process of evidence-gathering, synthesis and consultation. We conducted literature review, key expert interviews, and national stakeholder consultation meetings. The key experts were those who are domestically or internationally connected to HIV/AIDS issues, health care system analysis, and/or social, political or economic trend analysis. We used the "two axes" method to generate four contrasting scenarios by placing a major factor influencing the future of the issue being investigated on each of two axes, which cross to form four quadrants. We then created evidence-based narratives of the four resulting scenarios.

Scenario planning is a tool for diagnosis, not prescription.

Scenario planning can assist decision makers in assessing their assumptions and reviewing policy options. Although scenarios appear to be simple, their implications can be difficult to understand, and thus require careful engagement of stakeholders in their development and interpretation.

Scenario planning broadens the perspective of the HIV/AIDS response in Canada to frame it within the broader health care system and within society as a whole. It provides a robust and innovative framework to think about how the future will evolve and how to position ourselves, in order to influence the future.