

SAFETYNET AND ITS FUTURE

STRATEGIC PLANNING CONSULTATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS REPORT

July 2017

HIGHLIGHTS

- The consultation process included the creation of a Strategic Planning Committee and consultations with deans, senior administrators, and researchers at Memorial University, meetings with members of SafetyNet's Advisory Council as well as with other stakeholders, and discussions with the leaders of similar research centres.
- Finding ways to secure core and ongoing program funding became a key focus of the consultations because of University-wide funding cuts triggered by wider fiscal constraints in the province.
- Consultations revealed strong support for SafetyNet from within Memorial University, its community partners, and other national leaders in OHS research. There was a general consensus that SafetyNet is doing important work in innovative and creative ways that fits the mandate of the university and meets key provincial and often national needs.
- Discussions with other centres and community partners highlighted the importance of core funding for the operation of resilient, engaged centres and pointed to some of the strengths and weaknesses of different funding options.
- Assuming that the core funding challenge can be met, SafetyNet should, as it moves forward, strengthen its engagement with the wider university community and its community partners. Changes in governance should also be implemented.
- The following **next steps** were identified:
 - Continue to seek stable funding for core operations from external and internal sources.
 - Reorganize SafetyNet on a thematic basis by creating thematic, multidisciplinary research clusters with cluster leaders.

- Revise SafetyNet's Governance Structure and Terms of Reference to bring together the Board, Community Advisory Council, and cluster leaders and develop a process for appointment and review of Directors/Co-Directors
- Enhance visibility and linkages across the University and in the wider community.
- Enhance programming to further develop OHS research capacity and innovation in the province.

SAFETYNET'S ACHIEVEMENTS

The SafetyNet Centre for Occupational Health and Safety Research is the only broadly interdisciplinary research centre dedicated to occupational health and safety (OHS) east of Quebec. Since 2007, SafetyNet has used the core funding provided by the University (averaging \$150,000 per year) for its staff and operations to leverage over \$7.7 million in grant and contract funding from national, provincial, and university competitions (an average of \$700,000/year). This core funding has supported community-engaged research and knowledge mobilization on a wide range of OHS issues in a variety of occupational sectors. In recent years SafetyNet has supported research and knowledge exchange related to: the varieties and challenges of mobile work (www.onthemovepartnership.ca), participatory ergonomics, return to work, compensation policy and work disability policy issues, post-traumatic stress disorder, and the surveillance and prevention of occupational disease. SafetyNet-affiliated researchers have pursued these issues in industries such as aquaculture, construction, fishing, seafood processing, mining, agriculture, poultry processing, and food services and corrections officers.

Over the last 10 years, grants and contracts administered or supported in some way by SafetyNet have engaged at least 47 Memorial-based faculty members in 7 faculties and involved formal partnerships with 35 other universities and 30 community groups (18 local and 12 national). SafetyNet research has also supported more than 70 trainees working on research projects and other initiatives. This work has made SafetyNet the go-to partner for national OHS research initiatives in OHS seeking Atlantic Canadian involvement.

SafetyNet projects generally engage community partners at all stages of the research -- from the identification of problems, through the study design phase and into the analysis and mobilization of results. SafetyNet's community alliance approach to identifying and carrying out OHS research in intensive collaboration between the university and community stakeholders is distinctive both within Memorial and across Canada.

PLANNING THE FUTURE OF SAFETYNET

SafetyNet is at a crossroads. It began as a Community Alliance for Marine and Coastal Health Research funded in 2001 by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research. In 2007, SafetyNet became what was then called a “Type 2 Memorial University Research Centre” with a relatively modest amount of direct core funding (\$150,000 per year since 2010) and dedicated space provided by the university. This financial and in-kind support has been crucial for SafetyNet’s ongoing operations over the past decade. However, the financial constraints facing the province and the University have now brought SafetyNet to a critical juncture by jeopardizing its core funding.

For the current fiscal year, SafetyNet has received emergency core funding from the Office of Research and a few of the deans on SafetyNet’s Board to allow, in combination with other funding, a year in which to examine options. When the funding situation shifted, SafetyNet was, on instructions from the Board, in the process of wrapping up a broad set of consultations to mark its tenth anniversary and to inform the development of a strategic plan for the next five years. That strategic plan must now encompass both core funding options and governance, leadership, thematic, and other issues for the future.

This document highlights some of the key findings from the consultations and presents preliminary ideas about how SafetyNet can be sustained and made stronger and more resilient over the next 5 years.

THE CONSULTATIONS

The strategic planning process began in November, 2016. It has been informed by input from a Strategic Planning Committee consisting of Dr. Shree Mulay, Associate Dean of the Division of Community Health and Humanities in the Faculty of Medicine, Jackie Manuel, Executive Director of the NL Construction Safety Association and Chair of the SafetyNet Community Advisory Council, and Dr. Ray Gosine, Vice-President (Research) *pro tempore* and Chair of the SafetyNet Board. Consultations were held with deans or their representatives from faculties with a history of involvement in OHS research, researchers and trainees at Memorial interested in OHS, and representatives of the various government and community organizations involved with SafetyNet’s Community Advisory Council. SafetyNet’s Board and Community Advisory Council held a joint meeting on April 26th to discuss SafetyNet and its future. OHS experts (researchers and decision makers) from across the country and leaders of similar research centres in other parts of Canada were also consulted.

Insights from all of these consultations are woven together in the remainder of this document.

SafetyNet's Contributions

Memorial's legislated mandate and the specifications of recent framework documents on research, teaching and learning, and public engagement demonstrates the multiple ways in which SafetyNet fits with the University's priorities.¹ SafetyNet has played a key role in helping the University fulfill its "special obligation to the people of this province,"² including its workers, employers, government, and decision makers. Consultations revealed widely held concerns about the health and safety of this province's workers and an awareness that effective decision making for sustainable economic and social development depend heavily on university-based research and knowledge transfer. Those consulted also emphasized the importance of having access to the kind of locally-led, context-sensitive research that is required to understand OHS issues involving the economic activities, workplaces, occupations, and employees that predominate in this province.

[SafetyNet has] consistently emphasized the importance of knowledge mobilisation, including work with partners, but also interventions on every level, destined to the general public, the scientific community, and policy makers. The SafetyNet approach goes far beyond the usual 'publish or perish' practice associated with funded research, and they must be congratulated for providing a model to other researchers in OHS. (OHS Researcher - external)

As emphasized in the Joint SafetyNet Board / Community Advisory Council Meeting (April 26, 2017), over the years, SafetyNet's community partners have both contributed to, and benefited from, research partnerships with SafetyNet. Of key importance to community partners, SafetyNet has consistently acted as a resource from community groups dealing with key issues and a venue for community groups to have a voice in OHS research and knowledge transfer priorities for SafetyNet.

We needed SafetyNet to get ... projects off the ground. [Our partnership with SafetyNet is] essential for improving safety in the industry. It's a cost NOT to have SafetyNet for the industry. (Community Partner)

Up until recently, the disability community didn't have the capacity to identify and undertake research. We were provided a platform on a national level through a

¹ See Memorial's "Research Strategy Framework" (www.mun.ca/research/explore/framework/) and the "Public Engagement Framework" (www.mun.ca/publicengagement/memorial/Public_Engagement_Framework.pdf)

² Memorial University, "About." www.mun.ca/memorial/about/

project with SafetyNet and are at the table for legislation. We wouldn't have been able to do that without SafetyNet. (Community Partner)

OHS stakeholders in the community expressed the need for an independent source of research and knowledge to support their OHS agendas and to implement the province's legislated mandate to keep workers safe and healthy in a way that maximizes limited resources for research.

Research and information from SafetyNet have been important for lobbying for policy and legislative change and for advancing workers' rights. We don't have the expertise to do this without the help and engagement of SafetyNet. (Community Partner)

Given the types of research SafetyNet supports and the lead role SafetyNet has played in developing OHS training, the fit with Memorial's framework documents for teaching and learning is also clear. As for public engagement, SafetyNet's community alliance approach to research fits all four of that framework's goals³ especially Goal 4, which requires Memorial researchers and administrators to 'build, strengthen and sustain the bridges for public engagement.' What is unique about SafetyNet is the way it brings together research, training, and public engagement under one roof as integrated tools for developing and carrying out problem-solving research and knowledge transfer.

Deans on SafetyNet's Board, as well as community partners and a network of OHS experts across Canada asserted the strong benefit to the University of an interdisciplinary centre like SafetyNet.

Centre[s] are important for many students and in hiring faculty members – shows a vibrant level of activity. [They] promote the University nationally and internationally. (Dean/Director)

SafetyNet has consistently provided stimulation for the research community in occupational health and safety and has played a huge leadership role in bringing together researchers nationally and internationally for innovative projects and research programmes, as well as providing excellent opportunities for trainees. (OHS Researcher - external)

There was widespread agreement, particularly among the leading national OHS Researchers consulted, that SafetyNet's practice of building interdisciplinary and multi-institutional teams

³ "Public Engagement Framework"
(www.mun.ca/publicengagement/memorial/Public_Engagement_Framework.pdf)

for its community alliance approach to designing, executing, and implementing research is an innovative and important contribution to the Canadian OHS research enterprise.

SafetyNet has ... encouraged the development of interdisciplinary projects ...; [their] interdisciplinary projects involving action research and community engagement were innovative, important and productive both for the communities involved and for the research teams. (OHS Researcher - external)

SafetyNet is also seen to be one of the few truly interdisciplinary centres at Memorial. Several informants noted that this approach lines up well with the recent efforts of the University's senior administration to break down disciplinary silos both within and across faculties. Those consulted agreed that it was important for Memorial to have a high-quality, broadly focused, and nationally recognized research centre on OHS, especially given the absence of such units anywhere else in Atlantic Canada.

I think SafetyNet and its researchers are an essential player in the Canadian OHS research and knowledge mobilization community, and their leadership, continued to this day, is of huge importance for occupational health and safety researchers in Canada, and for policy makers who consume and apply that research. They know what they're doing, and don't really need to receive suggestions from others. (OHS Researcher - external)

SafetyNet is one of the few programs in Canada concentrating on occupational health issues and likely the only one that would consider issues specifically important to Newfoundland and Labrador in the area. (OHS Researcher - external)

Consultations with Memorial deans and researchers and with external collaborators provided numerous examples of how SafetyNet has succeeded, in a relatively short period of time, in establishing Memorial as the 'go-to' partner for national and international OHS research projects as evidenced by the numerous multi-institutional team projects that SafetyNet had been invited to join or has itself led. SafetyNet's leadership in this area has helped to ensure that OHS issues and experiences in NL are included in national research.

It would have been very difficult for us to carry out our research in NL without the help and support of SafetyNet ... I see SafetyNet as a key link to the broader health and safety community in Newfoundland and Labrador ... At conferences SafetyNet members often bring up issues unique to the experiences of N/L workers and keep these issues from being marginalized. (OHS Researcher – external)

Some noted the broad national and international collaborations involved in such major research programs as the *On the Move Partnership* (which is studying employment-related

geographical mobility in the Canadian context including its impacts on occupational health and compensation) as evidence of SafetyNet's success in becoming a significant player in a new and important field of research. Several of SafetyNet's collaborators from other provinces also noted its contributions to the key Canadian organization in the field, the Canadian Association for Research on Work and Health.

Another contribution of SafetyNet researchers has been their contribution to Canadian Centre for Research of Work & Health. SafetyNet has often been the only eastern representative on this important national committee. SafetyNet is a valuable resource to Memorial, NL, and Canada more broadly. (OHS Researcher - external)

With regard to teaching and learning, many of the people consulted, including those outside Memorial, noted contributions to the training and mentorship of graduate and post-graduate students.

[SafetyNet's] research outcomes and tools became important components of nearly all of the research I have completed in multiple industrial safety sectors. (Former graduate student)

[This consultation has made me realize that] I am more connected to SafetyNet than to my own department in terms of support and research activities. (Current graduate student)

The assessments of the proposed Interdisciplinary Master's Program in OHS, the development of which has been led by SafetyNet, have been very positive both from the faculties and departments consulted and from the review committee recently convened by the School of Graduate Studies.

This forward-thinking approach is what sets SafetyNet apart, together with its ability to draw faculty from across the university to contribute to this proposed new program. The proposed multi-disciplinary program will be unique in Canada, and its quality (practicums, research projects, post-doctoral seminar leaders) be enhanced through its relationship with SafetyNet. (Member of External Review Committee, Master's of Occupational Health and Safety/OHS Researcher - external)

Consultations with other OHS Research Centres

Directors of four other Canadian, university-affiliated OHS research centres similar to SafetyNet in size were consulted to learn about how they are organized and about their achievements and challenges. These included:

- the Centre for Research in Occupational Safety and Health (CROSH), Laurentian University
- the CN Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, St. Mary's University
- the Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture (CCHSA), University of Saskatchewan
- the Centre of Research Expertise for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders (CRE-MSD), University of Waterloo.

While Canada's larger OHS research centres (the Institute for Work & Health in Ontario and the IRSST in Quebec) have all had stable, long-term, multi-million-dollar funding from their provincial workers' compensation boards and/or ministries of labour, the financial experience of these four smaller centres has been mixed. Some have benefited, and continue to benefit, from regularly renewed multi-year funding arrangements while others are currently without such funding support. Directors of all four centres agreed that their experience in recent years has made it clear that an effective program of robust and locally relevant OHS research requires stable, multi-year core funding. Stable core funding was seen as crucial to retaining skilled and experienced staff, managing communications, developing and cultivating community partnerships, managing large multi-year research projects, and preparing and submitting grant applications that benefit their affiliated researchers and institutions and facilitate the future work of their centres.

SafetyNet's Current Limitations

One of SafetyNet's current limitations is uncertainty about its core funding. In addition, many of the Memorial administrators consulted noted that SafetyNet seemed to be better known and more highly regarded outside the university and the province than inside the university. They inquired about SafetyNet's efforts to make its work known across campus and urged SafetyNet to improve its approach to communications. Several of them, as well as the Memorial researchers consulted, noted that SafetyNet is very closely associated with the activities and achievements of its two co-directors rather than being seen as an organization with a broadly-based set of contributors. Some of those consulted indicated that while the leadership of the

co-directors, who have been in place for SafetyNet's entire lifespan, seems to have been highly satisfactory, formal procedures were needed to appoint, review, and replace co-directors as SafetyNet moves forward.

Members of SafetyNet's Community Advisory Council noted that they have not met very frequently in recent years and, in the current governance structure, there are no institutionalized linkages between their group and the Board. Most indicated they would be happy to meet more often and to be more actively involved and there was strong interest in meeting with the academic board.

Deans indicated that, in times of fiscal constraint like the present, their top priority had to be activities directly linked to their primary disciplinary mandates and most assessed this based on the number of researchers from their specific faculties who were currently involved in SafetyNet projects. This number varies over time, depending on the types of projects and funding SafetyNet has managed to secure and the fit between expertise in the different faculties and funding opportunities and research priorities identified by partners and granting agencies. As one dean observed about SafetyNet's partial reliance on deans for funding:

*Not having fixed funding definitely is a threat, but having faculties funding [SafetyNet] is a bigger threat as it will be the first to be cut during fiscal constraint.
(Dean/Director)*

There was some discussion during the joint Board-Community Advisory about the possibility for community partners to help provide core funding. This might be a possibility for some larger organizations like WorkplaceNL although its current structure only allows for project-based funding tied to accessing its research funds. However, most of the others including community groups and organized labour do not have access to funding for research on OHS.

Community groups don't have money per se; we can go to our larger organizations for support but the research would not be specific to the NL context. (Community Partner)

Community representatives also highlighted that relying on community groups for core funding would have some of the same problems as relying on the Deans:

Community partners share the same financial risk - funding to SafetyNet would be cut first if their funding is cut. (Community Partner)

A key issue is that interdisciplinary centres appear to be more at risk during times of fiscal constraint than other, more traditional, faculty-based parts of the university. Thus, many of

those consulted felt that, if the university wants to preserve its few interdisciplinary pioneers and initiatives like SafetyNet, it may need to provide them with special attention and sustained support during these difficult times.

While many senior Memorial administrators were uncertain about their ability to continue funding SafetyNet, many of the members of the SafetyNet Community Advisory Council and the external research experts consulted were puzzled by why such a small budget (\$150,000 per year) was causing such consternation. It was noted that this was a very small amount of core funding given all that SafetyNet had accomplished and the important role it plays in national and local research and in benefitting the wider community. SafetyNet's research collaborators from across the country were unanimous in the view that core funding for SafetyNet should be sustained.

SafetyNet's contribution to research and knowledge mobilization in Canada could be enhanced if it receives stable support to continue on its course of supporting graduate students, leading OHS research in Canada, and contributing to the national OHS academic curriculum. (OHS Researcher - external)

Further, as expressed at the joint SafetyNet Board and Community Advisory Council meeting, relying on external funding may pose its own set of risks including the possibility that too much reliance on a particular type of external funding could bias the research program and focus of SafetyNet:

The fear of securing external funding is the risk of bias. SafetyNet provides an agenda-neutral place for information. Community partners then take the information and use it for their purposes. (Community Partner)

NEXT STEPS

The consultations revealed strong support for SafetyNet from within Memorial University, from community partners, and from other national leaders in OHS research. There was a general consensus that SafetyNet is doing important work that fits the mandate of the university, meets key needs in the province and often nationally, and that is being done in innovative and creative ways. Despite this moral support, and a consensus that secure, stable core funding independent of a particular interest group or faculty played a crucial role in the success of SafetyNet, no obvious ways to fully address the current core funding challenge emerged from the consultations. The possible ways forward identified in this section are a combination of ideas heard during consultations, and ideas that have been developed by core members of SafetyNet based on these discussions. They include ideas for finding core funding as well as

ways to improve SafetyNet’s engagement within and beyond the university, its governance structure, and communications.

1. Secure Core Funding

What I do hope for is that SafetyNet receives stable, long term, institutional support for its activities so that they can keep doing what they do well, research and knowledge mobilization, in a secure environment where they are assured of long term infrastructure funding. The more time we have to spend on stabilizing core activities, the more time is taken away from research and knowledge mobilization. (OHS Researcher - external)

SafetyNet must continue to seek to convince key academic and administrative units at Memorial that ongoing core funding of SafetyNet makes sense in terms of maximizing available funding and support in providing exemplary research opportunities for its faculty and trainees.

While stable, renewable funding commitments from Memorial remain important, SafetyNet leadership must also identify alternative, external sources of core funding from stakeholders and corporate and philanthropic donors along the lines developed in other provinces. Funding from these external sources could provide general support for SafetyNet’s core activities and it could also be linked to specific, stakeholder-oriented activities including Speakers’ Series, a Visiting Scholar Program, Fellowships, and/or Seed Grant/Project Funding. SafetyNet is also exploring the possibility of establishing an “Evidence in Context Research Synthesis” program that external agencies can utilize to address specific OHS issues on a cost-recovery basis (see also “Enhanced Programming” below).

2. Transform SafetyNet into the Hub for a Series of Thematic Clusters

SafetyNet’s visibility within the University and its ability to secure active involvement of a larger number of researchers and trainees could be enhanced by developing a set of thematic ‘clusters’ each focusing on a group of key issues and led by a few research and possibly community champions who, together, would form part of the leadership cadre of SafetyNet. Researchers, students and community partners could be affiliated with one or several of these clusters. Each of these clusters would help:

- bring together researchers and trainees across the university to learn and begin to develop new research and KM partnerships around key themes
- nurture collaborations between departments/faculties, with other academic institutions, and with community partners/stakeholders

- better involve community partners in identifying and carrying out research pertinent to them
- connect local researchers and stakeholders to local and national networks.

SafetyNet would provide support to clusters and cluster leaders by helping to organize meetings and presentations, identifying potential funding opportunities, assisting with the development and submission of funding applications, and helping to build partnerships and collaborations with community partners and researchers within Memorial and beyond.

Clusters would be multidisciplinary and would not be tied to any one faculty. Each cluster would be led by one or two researchers or a dyad of a researcher and a community partner. Cluster leaders would form an Executive Committee within SafetyNet to work with the Director or Co-Directors to improve governance. Experience leading a cluster could provide a training ground for the future directorship of SafetyNet. This structure, if implemented, would need to be kept flexible so that the designation of clusters and their mandates can be updated on a regular basis.

On the basis of current and planned activities and interests at Memorial and work already happening through SafetyNet or currently being planned, six potential Clusters for the next five years have been identified:

1. *Psychosocial Health, Wellness and Work*

Members of the Faculty of Business Administration have expressed an interest in providing leadership for a Psychosocial Health, Wellness and Work Cluster which would also include researchers such as Rose Ricciardelli from Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) who studies work-related stress and psychological impairment in a range of military, police, and security-related jobs and researchers in other faculties. This Cluster would provide an opportunity to realize many of the objectives outlined in a Centre proposal in the Faculty of Business Administration.

2. *Occupational Disease Prevention*

Preventing occupational disease is a major challenge in NL and globally. SafetyNet has completed a solid body of research in this area and is well connected to researchers within Memorial and nationally in the field. This Cluster would help to carry forward and diversify research and knowledge mobilization taking place in this critical field and ensure it is informed by the NL context.

3. *Marine Occupational Health and Safety* (including fishing, seafood processing, aquaculture and shipping)

SafetyNet began as a centre focused on OHS in marine and coastal work. That focus continues to be a priority at SafetyNet and will be very important over the next five years due to its active involvement with the recently established Ocean Frontier

Institute. Marine safety is also a key focus in other parts of Memorial. This Cluster would link researchers doing research in this area across disciplines, faculties, and programmes of research.

A key related SafetyNet activity happening in June 2018 is the IFISH 5 conference on fishing, seafood processing and aquaculture safety. This will take place at Memorial and is being co-organized with NIOSH representatives with some funding from NIOSH.

4. *Work Disability Policy*

SafetyNet is host to the NL Cluster of the Centre for Research in Work Disability Policy. SafetyNet is also providing support for a national study on return to work among precariously employed and mobile workers that could become a major national initiative. The work of this existing cluster has provided a tremendous opportunity to bring together OHS and disability researchers with community partners working in these areas. This Cluster would sustain this work.

5. *The Health and Safety of Mobile Workers*

The On the Move Partnership is a national SafetyNet program of research studying employment-related geographical mobility in the Canadian context. OHS and compensation are key parts of that research program and a number of spinoff projects are addressing some of the emerging issues in this field. Some others are under development including one that might look at work related mobility, work and chronic disease management.

SafetyNet Research and Knowledge Transfer Clusters



3. Revise SafetyNet's Governance Structures

Consultations with university administration, faculty, community partners, and with other experts has resulted in a number of suggestions to improve SafetyNet's Governance Structure.

It was recommended by both members of SafetNet's Board and Community Advisory Council that structured links between the two be created with overlapping memberships with two or three members of each body sitting as full members on the other with regular procedures for cross-reporting.

Strengthening SafetyNet's leadership structure could be achieved through restructuring. Creating a 'Steering Committee' to give the Director(s), Chair of the Board, the Chair of the Community Advisory Council, as well as the coordinators of the five clusters regular input into ongoing decision making.

These changes would be embodied in a revised 'Terms of Reference' document that would include the membership, mandate, and procedures of the Board and Community Advisory Council, and procedures for the appointment, review, and renewal of SafetyNet's Co-directors/Director at regular intervals.

4. Enhance Visibility and Linkages

Consultations revealed a number of potential initiatives that would improve SafetyNet's visibility and linkages across the University and into the wider community while enhancing OHS capacity at Memorial, including:

- more frequent meetings of SafetyNet's Community Advisory Council
- regular visits to all relevant academic units to describe SafetyNet's activities, describe opportunities for participation by faculty members and graduate students and seeking new ideas for how SafetyNet can connect with them
- mechanisms for linking researchers and graduate students with SafetyNet such as formal 'associate' positions, possibly through the Cluster structure
- a small awards competition that could fund seed grants for faculty members and fellowships for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

5. Enhance Programming

SafetyNet is exploring a number of activities that have been identified as potential ways to enhance programming as well as develop research capacity and innovation in the province.

These ideas would require additional external funding and include:

- a regular speakers' series, possibly in collaboration with community stakeholders
- a visiting researcher program that would bring experts in OHS from other universities and stakeholder organizations to SafetyNet
- a program of applied research projects designed to provide decision support to key stakeholders, including the sector councils, WorkplaceNL, government, labour and employers associations, on issues identified by them. This could take the form of new research or synthesis of existing research or a combination of the two.