Applying an implementation science framework to understand autism assessment: Facilitators and barriers in Ontario and Alberta

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Background

- **Autism** is a neuro-developmental condition and **early diagnosis** is key
- **General perceptions** of community pediatricians have been explored
- An **implementation science framework** allows for a more **systematic understanding** of barriers & facilitators

Objective

Apply an **implementation science framework** to assess **diagnostic facilitators and barriers** faced by pediatricians across Ontario and Alberta to help facilitate appropriate **toolkits and strategies**

Method

Nine pediatricians (eight women; one man) with a range of years in practice and autism-specific training participated across **five focus group/dyad interviews in Ontario and Alberta**

Transcripts were coded and analyzed by 1) **identifying facilitators and barriers**, 2) identifying the relevant Theoretical Domains Framework **(TDF) domains** for each facilitator and barrier, and 3) summarizing using **belief statements**

Preliminary Results

Category	TDF Domain	Belief Statement
Facilitator	Skills	**Having a range of exposure can serve as an important skill base in better understanding autism and assessment** *(e.g."You need to be able to see the variation of the language, of what social communication, what is eye contact look like, what is joint attention, and you need to be able to see it in different settings to recognize it so I think volume is critical." [Site 1, Transcript 1, Participant 1])*
Facilitator	Knowledge	**General pediatric skills and interpersonal skills help create a strong foundation** *(e.g. "Like the basics that any general should have of just like taking a really full like a complete history and asking about specifically all of the different diagnostic criteria and then having some sort of mechanism set up where you can get the feedback from like the school, the family, and then, you know, having the administrative support." [Site 2, Transcript 4, Participant 8))*
Barrier	Environmental Context and Resources	**Supports like social workers, interpreters, and a multi-disciplinary team can help address current barriers faced by families and clinicians** *(e.g. "The educational level and the academic abilities of the parents when it comes to filling the forms. That's huge too because some of those forms can be really complicated. [...] So it's not accessible for those who aren't technologically aware and comfortable." [Site 1, Transcript 2, Participant 4])*
Barrier	Environmental Context and Resources	**There's a lack of publicly-funded supports available in Alberta, no matter how much a child may need it after a certain age** *(e.g. "Most of our local elementary schools will provide speech pathology in kindergarten. Very rare to get it beyond kindergarten, regardless of how much a child might need speech pathology." [Site 2, Transcript 5, Participant 9]).*

Conclusion

Remaining **analysis underway**; final results to include **multi-provincial data** for diagnostic barriers and facilitators (Ontario, Alberta, Nova Scotia, British Columbia)

Toolkits will help **support clinicians**; influence **policy change**; ultimately **improve early diagnosis and resource access** for families and autistic youth

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