

Welcome to the World of Healthy Communities

Nancy

Whether you are a municipal, provincial, or federal politician, Regional Health Board or Community Health Council member, a business leader, health professional, a recreation practitioner, a community worker, a planner or a citizen involved in your community, an interest in healthy communities means you have an interest in making your community a better place to live.

The Healthy Communities Approach A Responsible Way of Thinking and Working

In the context of diminishing resources and increasing expectations, we simply need to find better ways to plan and work together to ensure healthy living conditions within our communities. The healthy community approach is a responsible way to address whatever people feel makes their community and therefore themselves healthy. It helps to integrate the many factors that affect community, into a single focused framework for action.

A commitment to building Healthy Communities requires the review and adjustment of our present way of doing business. For some, it is a simple matter of fine tuning; for others, it means a fundamental shift in thinking and working patterns.

The Road to Building Healthy Communities

There are as many ways to build a healthy community as there are communities. An effective Healthy Community approach depends, however, on the following strategies:

- Wide Community Participation
- Involvement and collaboration of leaders from many sectors
- Local government commitment
- Healthy Public Policy

What makes the Healthy Communities process so unique is its continual focus and emphasis on the role of local government in improving the health of Canadians.

The British Columbia Healthy Communities Objectives

1. To facilitate information sharing among local healthy communities and health promotion initiatives as well as between various levels of governments and health promotion initiatives.
2. To assist in the establishment and implementation of education and skill development strategies and

regional healthy communities networks.

3. To promote the Network as a resource to local governments, Regional Health Boards and Community Health councils, local healthy community initiatives, health promotion initiatives and community development strategies in understanding the impact of policy and planning on the determinants of health.
4. To develop partnerships with other British Columbia networks, organizations and agencies.
5. To liaise and network with other Canadian and international healthy communities networks and others as necessary

We are constantly looking for ways to improve this web site. All comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated. Please send them to BCHealthyCommunities.com.

History

The History of Healthy Communities

The healthy city or healthy communities concept is not new. Its origins can be traced to the 19th century public health movement, and such organizations as the Health of Towns Association in Britain. Even the early incarnations of this idea were rooted in the towns and rapidly growing cities. As Jessie Parfit, author of a history of health in Oxford from 1770 to 1974, remarked:

The term Healthy Cities was coined in 1985. It was the title of a speech given at an international meeting in Canada. The theme - health is the result of much more than medical care; people are healthy when they live in nurturing environments and are involved in the life of their community, when they live in Healthy Cities.

This presentation offered a new view of the interactions that affect people's lives. It took into consideration the influence of the context - the place, surrounding, relationships and opportunities on the individual.

It began to highlight the interconnections among what seem to be diverse elements and problems in society. And finally, it suggested the solutions to both community and quality of life problems also may be interwoven.

The World Health Organization (WHO) soon opened a Healthy Cities Project office in Europe. Cities were encouraged to target and solve local problems and get people from many parts of the community involved in the Healthy Cities process. Whether the primary reason people convene involves children, environmental concerns, homelessness, safety, education or other issues, the approach is always the same: a collaboration is organized among citizens and people from business, government and other sectors of society who recognize their interconnection can be used to impact the well-being of the entire community.

WHO then invited practitioners to come together and share strategies, resources and success stories. People from the local community level on up through government representatives were very enthusiastic about the results of their efforts. This in turn stimulated many more projects. Very similar activities and meetings were also taking place in the U.S., Canada, Latin America, Africa and Asia. While not always calling themselves Healthy Cities, the same approach - organizing people from diverse sectors to solve problems together - was being used. Both local and global gatherings continued to provide platforms for the exchange of Healthy Cities ideas and the Healthy Cities movement was born.

In Canada, the Healthy Communities concept was directed and coordinated by a consortium headed by the Canadian Public Health Association, Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Institute of Planners. The work was launched and enhanced with the creation of the 1988 Ottawa Charter that highlighted and emphasized the important role of Health Promotion for improving the health of all Canadians. Within British Columbia, the Public Health Association of BC and the BC Ministry of Health undertook to implement Healthy Community Strategies across the province under the guidance of the Ottawa Charter.

The Healthy Communities movement now includes project in well over 1000 cities and more are starting all the time. Each project defines different goals and activities but all bring a wide variety of people into the community improvement work at hand. While in the past, people often divided into disciplines, sectors

or interest groups to solve problems, when a Healthy Cities project is organized, everyone participates together.

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