



Vancouver Coastal
Health Authority

North Shore/Coast Garibaldi, Vancouver & Richmond



INTRODUCTION

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement encompasses a wide variety of processes and activities that include the spectrum of approaches from consultations with the public to involving communities in their own health through community development and community capacity building.

Why engage the community?

- To assess needs of the community
- To improve services based on community feedback
- To target resources where they are most valued by the community
- To foster self-help and mutual-aid
- To be publicly accountable by sharing information on decision-making

Benefits of engaging with your community.

- Understanding of the community issues, values, ideas and attitudes that are not readily apparent to the health system
- Providing the trust, the openness and the tools the community needs to better understand how and why decisions were made
- Establishing cooperation and dialogue
- Reducing or eliminating community criticism of decisions
- Reflecting community values and needs in decisions

Who will engage with the community at the VCHA?

Engaging with the community is a responsibility shared by all levels of the organization. The type and process of engagement will largely depend on the decision to be made or the issues being addressed.

The full spectrum of community engagement activities includes community consultation, healthy communities partnerships and community capacity building. These activities will be undertaken by the Community Involvement Team in collaboration with community developers and other staff working across the entire VCHA region, with each group taking leadership as appropriate to the activity.

THE EXPECTATION

Ministry of Health Expectations for Public Consultation

The Ministry of Health has developed a Consultation Framework to establish a baseline expectation for public consultation for all health authorities across the province. The model is an “advisory” approach intended to

- a) obtain input in developing regional goals, three-year service plans, and specific programs and services;
- b) obtain feedback on performance against the plan;
- c) each Health Authority will hold a public meeting at least once a year in each health service delivery area.

Within this framework, the Ministry also recognizes that different regions face different challenges. These differences may lead each region to customize their community engagement approaches in ways that reflect the uniqueness of each community.

Program staff is the group that will consult with communities and clients most frequently. Senior management and the Board will also consult with communities, but less frequently and on the strategic issues facing the organization.

Ministry of Health Guiding Principles

The Ministry of Health has identified a series of core principles that guide the framework for consultation for all health authorities. They are summarised here:

- **Advisory consultation** – on three year plans, on specific health programs and on performance evaluations
- **Variety of inputs** – decisions will be based on public, stakeholder, technical, financial, and public policy sources of information
- **Clear reasons for consultation** – only when the decision can benefit from consultation input
- **Fair, transparent, legitimate process** – guidelines for when and how consultation will be conducted
- **Availability of resources, skills and tools** – ensuring staff can support the consultation process and remove any barriers to accessing the process

THE VCHA COMMITMENT

VCHA Principles for Community Engagement.

The Vancouver Coastal Health Authority is committed to a series of principles to support the engagement of its communities across the region.

- Transparency of purpose, of goals, of accountabilities, of commitments, of expectations, and of constraints
- Level of engagement based on appropriateness to the purpose
- Clear, accessible, sufficient communication and information for decision-making
- Engagement in the process at the earliest point possible and with as much time as possible
- Engagement of the full diversity of communities impacted by the purpose, by the process, and by the outcomes
- Supports for “hard-to-reach” and/or marginalized communities to participate
- Transparency of how engagement will impact and be used in decision-making
- Evaluation and monitoring of the effectiveness of community engagement

Program Areas and Community Engagement Activities at the VCHA.

The Community Involvement Team focuses on three main functional areas:

- **Health systems policy** – Community input, where appropriate, will influence priority policy areas as well as content of policies at the VCHA
- **Community planning and partnerships** – Community Advisory Committees (one per Health Services Delivery Area and one for the Aboriginal community) are supported as they provide advice to VCHA management about when and how to engage the relevant communities in VCHA strategic planning and cross-jurisdictional healthy communities partnerships
- **SMART Funds** – communities are engaged in proposing and participating in population health focused projects that build community capacity

In addition to the work of the Community Involvement Team, Community Developers work with local communities to build community capacity and participate in healthy communities partnerships.

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Ladder of Participation

A variety of approaches and activities are employed when the VCHA engages the community. This spectrum of community engagement has been depicted in a variety of ways, the most visually clear of which refers to the “ladder of participation” and is shown below:

<i>Degree of Engagement</i>	<i>Role of Public/Community</i>	<i>VCHA Examples</i>
Empower	Identifies issues, solutions; takes action; Is supported by the system to reach goals.	SMART Fund Projects
Collaborate	Given authority to make some decisions; System defines limits and overall plan; Involved jointly in initial planning.	Patient Care Planning
	Joint planning, with plans subject to Change based on public engagement.	Vancouver Agreement (a multi-governmental planning table)
Involve	Advises system on its plans. System may change plans if necessary.	Community Advisory Committees
Consult	Is consulted on finalized plans to Promote community acceptance.	Phase II Projects (health system planning and reorganization)
Inform	Receives information and announcements.	Chief Operating Officers Accountability Sessions

Source: adapted from WHO

The examples above illustrate some of the ways in which the VCHA will engage the community across the entire spectrum of community participation levels depending on the issues, decisions and projects under development. The VCHA has designed its community engagement activities to facilitate the highest degree of community involvement in decisions closest to the community and/or the client. The VCHA Board of Governors will receive and consider community input along with other major inputs prior to making governance decisions whereas front-line managers and program directors will work in partnership with their specific communities when designing the details of new programs/services or when evaluating existing programs/services.