BC Healthy Communities
People. Place. Potential.

MOUVEMENT ACADIEN DES COMMUNAUTÉS EN SANTÉ
DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK

Canadian Healthy Communities
Creative collaborations to strengthen communities

Communautés en santé du Canada
Collaborations créatives pour renforcer les collectivités

OHCC · CCSO
Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
Coalition des communautés en santé de l'Ontario

RÉSEAU QUÉBÉCOIS DE VILLES ET VILLAGES EN SANTÉ

The Healthy Communities Approach:
A Framework for Action on the Determinants of Health

Core Values and Building Blocks

The Healthy Communities (HC) movement has its origins in Canada during the 1980's. The movement became worldwide when the World Health Organization (WHO) initiated their "Healthy Cities Project" across Europe in 1986 (Hancock, 2009). Today, the HC approach is used in cities, towns, municipalities, villages and communities around the world. In Canada, strong healthy community networks exist in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. The fundamental core value of the HC approach is capacity building and empowerment of individuals, organizations and communities.

Based on the WHO's success factors for any healthy community initiative, the HC approach addresses multiple determinants of health (social, economic, environment, physical) and is based on five essential strategies- or building blocks- to build on a community's existing capacity to improve community health and wellbeing:

> **Five key building blocks:**
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> - Community/citizen engagement;
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> - Multi-sectoral collaboration;
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> - Political commitment;
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> - Healthy public policy; and
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> - Asset-based community development.

Communities using a Healthy Communities approach have found that it facilitates innovative and creative solutions to community issues and supports collaborative initiatives that address wide ranging community health challenges. At the heart of the HC process is community and citizen engagement. Wide community involvement is particularly important for creating a shared vision for a common future and provides opportunities for individual and community empowerment and leadership. Engagement strategies are inclusive and take a '*whole of community*' approach. Community members bring their voice to defining the issues, generating solutions, taking action and evaluating overall success and learning.

Strong partnerships are also needed within and across a wide range of sectors including: environment, agriculture, sports/leisure, education, social, faith, culture, language, government and business. There is a vital role for involvement of all levels of government (local, provincial, national) in creating conditions for health and human development. While multi-sectoral partnerships are key, equally important are inter-sectoral, inter-departmental and inter-ministerial partnerships. Working together, through taking a bottom up and top down approach, communities and governments (at all levels) can create conditions for the health and wellbeing of the whole community.

Another key aspect of successful HC initiatives is healthy public policy--that is, policy that is explicitly designed to improve population health but not necessarily developed by the health sector. Healthy public policies are those that, for example, promote active transportation, affordable and stable housing, and community food security and are designed to have as one benefit the improvement of population health and life quality.

Communities hold much knowledge, expertise and understanding of historical community context. Building on the existing assets of a community (physical resources, existing strengths and capacities of people, organizations, and institutions) is empowering to community members while also acknowledging of the intrinsic merit and abilities individuals and communities have to contribute. Expanding on and nurturing existing community strengths helps to build lasting solutions and foster community sustainability.

Integrated Action on the Determinants of Health

In 1948, The World Health Organization declared that health " is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (OCDPA 2008). The multiple factors and conditions that contribute to, or undermine our health are known as the determinants of health and they encompass the places where we live, learn, work and play. Examples of the determinants of health include: income and social status, education and literacy, physical environments, personal coping skills, healthy child development, biology and genetic endowment, gender and culture. When we explore how the determinants come together and influence each other we are better equipped to go beyond mere symptoms and understand and take action on the underlying contributing factors.

Outcomes of a Healthy Communities Approach

There are many benefits to using a Healthy Communities approach. It provides community members with an opportunity to voice their concerns, learn about complex issues and develop innovative solutions.   Local governments and service providers are able to draw on insights and energies from local residents, which help to inform development of healthy public policy (OHCC 2011). Healthy Community activities can lead to outcomes (at the individual to the national level) such as healthier lifestyle choices, improved health status, increased knowledge, skills, expertise, stronger partnerships, cleaner physical environments, a growing economy and healthier, resilient communities.

References:

Hancock, Trevor. Act Locally: Community-base Population Health Promotion. Senate Sub-Committee on Population Health (2009).

Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (OCDPA), Primer to Action: Social Determinants of Health, (2008).

Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition (OHCC) website:
http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/en/what-makes-a-healthy-community accessed July 2011

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CORE VALUE

Capacity Building and Empowerment (Individuals, Organizations, Communities)

Key Building Blocks of the Healthy Communities Approach

- Community/Citizen Engagement
- Multi-Sectoral Collaboration
- Political Commitment
- Healthy Public Policy
- Asset-Based Community Development

Integrated Action on the Determinants of Health

- Income and Social Status
- Social Support Networks
- Education and Literacy

- Employment/ Working Conditions
- Social Environments
- Physical Environments

- Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills
- Healthy Child Development
- Biology and Genetic Endowment

- Health Services
- Gender
- Culture

Examples of Outcomes

Individual
- Skills/Behaviours
- Social Participation
- Lifestyle
- Knowledge
- Health Status

Organization
- Participation
- Skills Development
- Critical Knowledge
- Communication
- Recognition
- Provision/Access to Services

Community
- Governance
- Social
- Economy
- Culture
- Environment
- Healthy Public Policy
- Resilience
- Social Inclusion

Regional / Provincial / National
- Governance
- Legislation
- Programs
- Healthy Public Policies