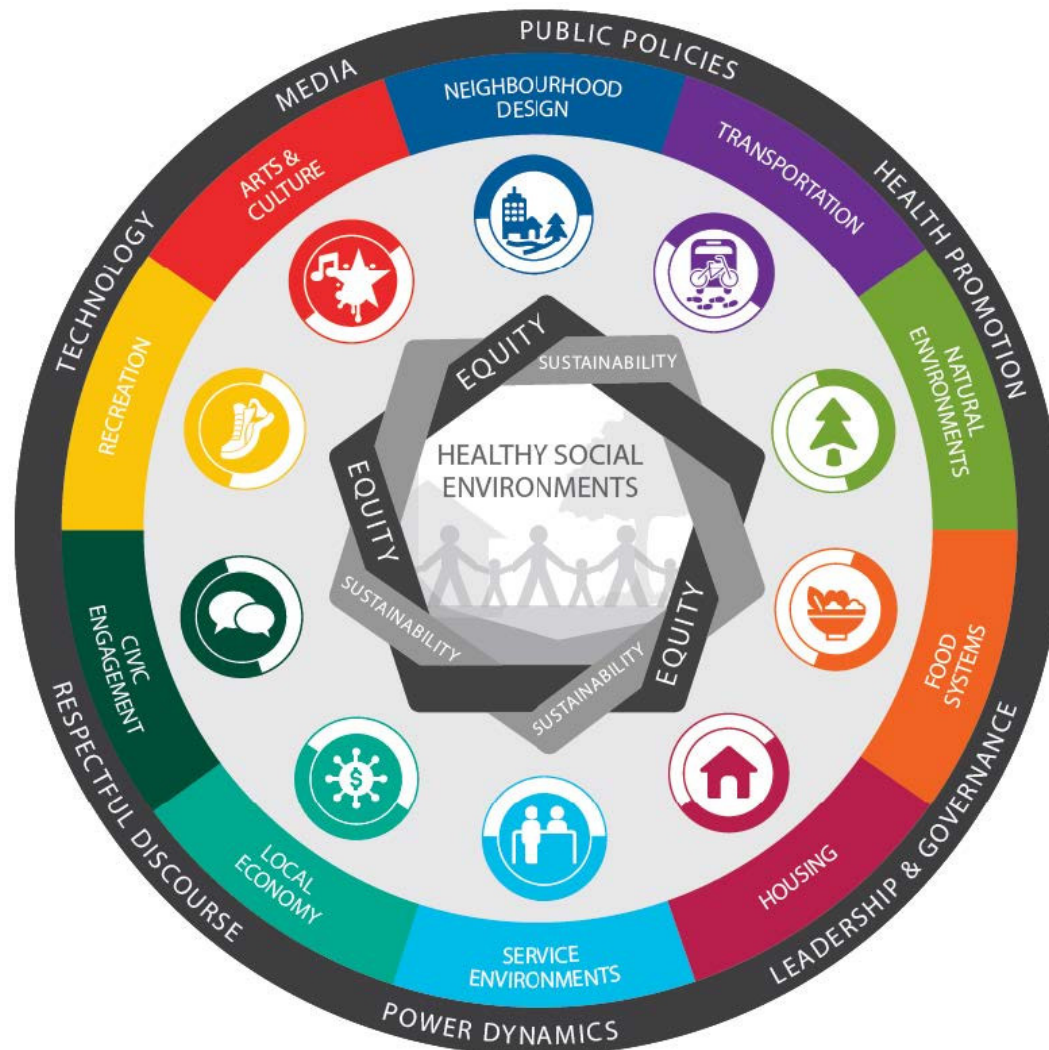


# Healthy Social Environments Framework

(Version 1 - Dec 2020)



BC Centre for Disease Control  
Provincial Health Services Authority



## What is the social environment?

The social environment is the underlying social, cultural and economic context within which we live, work & play. It includes all the interpersonal elements of our environments and encompasses all of the structures and processes we create, relationships we have and actions we take to organize and improve our lives.

The social environment influences and is influenced by individuals' relationships and interactions with other humans, with their communities, with the physical environment, with organized systems (public and private), and with the policies we create to order our lives.

The social environment is present at multiple levels, is people & relationship-centered, is comprised of multiple interconnected features, and is influenced by power relations.

## What is this Framework?

The Healthy Social Environments (HSE) Framework is a user-friendly, evidence-based, and expert informed tool that builds on recommendations offered in the Healthy Built Environment Linkages Toolkit. It describes the social and built environment as inextricably connected and mutually reinforcing.

The HSE Framework asserts that if we strive to pursue practice principles for each of the ten social environment features while we are implementing social interventions, we can achieve positive social connections in the short-medium term and achieve community wellbeing as an end result. The ultimate goal is broadly operationalized as "healthy people living in vibrant communities".

In order to achieve community wellbeing, the social environment must also support health equity by advancing economic, environmental and social sustainability, and fostering belonging, inclusivity, and diversity.

## How might this Framework be used?

This Framework is designed to support the wide range of individuals involved in informing, influencing and making community planning decisions:

- community planners (e.g., land-use planners and social planners).
- planning professionals (e.g., architects, design professionals, engineers).
- local and regional government managers, staff and officials.
- health professionals (e.g., MHOs, EHOs, population health and healthy communities staff).
- others involved in the design of communities (e.g., NGOs, schools, faith based organizations, residents).

It can be used as a resource to:

- initiate and organize conversations about social connection in community
- frame and organize presentations, discussions, proposals & briefing documents
- provide health evidence, perspectives and content to inform community plans (e.g., OCPs, social plans), projects and strategies
- guide research and education
- encourage collaborative action by community stakeholders



## Neighbourhood Design

- Create design guidelines that encourage positive interactions/“neighbourliness” and implement interventions that boost social capital and community belonging, e.g. open spaces that are inviting and well kept, group walking programs.
- Encourage community development projects that are neighbourhood based and resident-led. Involve residents in neighbourhood design and rejuvenation efforts, particularly those that will improve perceptions of safety.
- Include residents in maintenance efforts. E.g., neighbourhood cleanup and beautification programs.
- Prioritize mixed land use and provide a diversity of practical destinations in close proximity to residential areas.
- Identify ways to encourage residents to use public spaces to their full potential.



## Transportation

- Promote programs that foster a culture of active transportation and reduced personal car use. E.g., public education efforts, financial incentives/disincentives, employer initiatives to support commuters.
- Encourage active transportation interventions that integrate neighborhood involvement such as volunteering. Prioritize interventions that promote friendly interactions with friends, neighbours, parents, and teachers.
- Ensure that outdoor spaces where walking and cycling take place are health promoting. E.g., safe, good air quality.
- Prioritize mixed land use and destination diversity to increase active travel.



## Natural Environments

- Offer amenities to encourage use of natural spaces. E.g., signage to explain proper use of paths, washrooms that are safe, clean and inclusive, fishing piers, rental facilities for canoeing & kayaking.
- Support interaction with nature through free/low-cost local activities such as nature walks, social clubs, music performances, pop-up parks and fun fairs. Also consider more structured options such as community-based outdoor adventure programs and organized camping opportunities.
- Establish a clear process for the community to participate in local natural disaster planning.
- Create opportunities for community management of natural spaces such as conservation initiatives, environmental enhancement, Indigenous natural resource management and community forest governance.
- Put broad participation processes in place to identify and reduce access barriers experienced by residents, and to ensure natural spaces are perceived as accessible, attractive and safe.



## Food Systems

- Increase food security by making nutritious food an easy option. E.g., available, affordable, accessible and culturally suitable.
- Design and implement policies to improve local food systems. E.g., establish a local food policy council to inform supply and demand, implement healthy retail food environment policies.
- Deliver nutrition education and cooking skills programs based on the needs and desires of the community.
- Ensure gardening is available to all. E.g., hands-on gardening programs, provision of land.
- Promote the production and consumption of local food. E.g., farmer’s markets, local food hubs.
- Implement initiatives to prioritize the unique food system needs of rural and Indigenous communities.
- Take action and provide amenities to minimize food waste.



## Housing

- Take steps to ensure housing is affordable for all. E.g., rent subsidies & other financial aid to relocate economically disadvantaged families to low-poverty neighbourhoods, inclusionary zoning, incentives for developers.
- Prioritize interventions that support exiting homelessness as well as those that increase housing stability, proactive use of prevention services, and reduce hospitalizations. E.g., effective supportive housing models such as Housing First, group-based treatment options, diverse respite care program models.
- Establish partnerships between a wide range of stakeholders to strengthen built and social aspects of local housing. E.g., support community agencies to secure space in new developments, encourage building managers and strata councils to engage residents, involve potential renters or buyers in the planning process.



## Service Environments

- Establish a range of human and social services based on the needs and desires of the community. E.g., healthcare, schools, childcare and early learning, seniors programs and facilities, Indigenous services, newcomer services, food and income supports, recreation, and many more.
- Foster partnerships within and between health and social service systems including government and non-government organizations.
- Establish integrated service networks that can foster a continuum of multi-agency supports for populations that benefit from multiple services.
- Co-locate multiple services for the same population at a single site. E.g., school-based health centres, early years' service hubs, child and family hubs, seniors' service hubs.
- Provide services in a range of settings including the community, the home and various healthcare settings.



## Local Economy

- Ensure that all community members have access to employment at a living wage.
- Promote non-wage job supports and social enterprises as a means for helping to increase economic security. E.g., self-employment programs, job development support, supported employment.
- Initiate workplace wellness interventions that improve employee health and well-being and in turn the health of families and communities. E.g., multi-component programs that pair fitness, education, and personal development skills.
- Prioritize workplace flexibility. E.g., scheduling, work from home and retirement options.
- Provide ample and accessible opportunities for lifelong learning and development for people of all ages and cultures in formal and non-formal settings. E.g., libraries, community centres, schools.



## Civic Engagement

- Encourage individuals to volunteer their time (formally or informally) to positively contribute to their community.
- Enable residents to actively participate in the democratic process and political activities.
- Ensure information is provided in a meaningful, accessible, transparent and equitable way when leading engagement processes. Seek input from diverse stakeholders, including populations that are commonly excluded from decision-making processes, on decisions that influence their physical and social environment.



## Recreation

- Provide opportunities for community members of all ages and abilities to participate in a variety of physical and non-physical recreation.
- Provide safe places for kids to engage in active and unstructured outdoor play, including risky play. Consider establishing pop-up initiatives such as temporary play streets to support healthy play.
- Actively engage with the community to co-create and deliver a range of recreation opportunities that are equitable and adaptable.
- Promote physical activity and recreation activities through community campaigns, education, social marketing and "point of decision" prompts. For the largest impact, consider a multi-component approach that combines policies (e.g. equity, inclusion and accessibility policies), marketing and education (e.g. mass media campaigns), environmental enhancements (e.g. beautification projects), community events (e.g. bike to work week) and a variety of physical (e.g. walking groups) and non-physical (e.g. book clubs) recreation programs.



## Arts & Culture

- Establish community programming that celebrates diverse people and cultures and at the same time creates opportunities to learn and explore each others' histories. E.g., festivals, performances, pop-up events, and community art.
- Provide opportunities to create art through diverse group and community-based arts programming.
- Preserve and celebrate heritage through historic sites, heritage districts, monuments, public art and heritage centres.
- Invest in facilities and organizations that allow individuals to engage with art, culture and heritage. E.g., museums, galleries, libraries, cultural organizations.
- Establish policies that prioritize accessible art and cultural expression in the community. E.g., municipal cultural planning, heritage-led regeneration and inclusive arts & cultural policies.
- Integrate a wide variety of physical art, visual imagery, and mediums into the local landscape and ensure that a variety of family dynamics and roles are represented.

