

A PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The key goal for public health is to keep as many Canadians healthy for as long as possible, helping to reduce the pressures on the health care system.

The Government of Canada, provinces and territories are committed to working together through a Pan-Canadian Public Health Network that will function as a mechanism for intergovernmental coordination on public health issues. Through these new opportunities for collaboration, federal, provincial and territorial governments can work towards the development of a set of health goals for Canadians and the development and implementation of activities to help support Canadians achieve these goals.

Through Budget 2004, the Government of Canada committed \$665 million in initial funding to strengthen Canada's public health system.

Why is it important?

Public health is a key part of any overall health strategy since we know that an excellent health care system is simply not enough. We have to help Canadians stay healthy in order to sustain the health care system.

Public health efforts focus on more than infectious diseases and cover a wide range of activities, from immunization, emergency preparedness and safe blood, food and water to nutrition, early childhood development, healthy living and chronic disease and injury prevention and control. In particular, the growing epidemic of obesity and physical inactivity in Canada that is increasing Canadians' risk of preventable chronic diseases. The threat of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer, will only increase if Canadians do not take steps to improve their health with the help of effective public health programs.

Benefits for Canadians

Public health identifies threats to the health of Canadians and develops programs and initiatives to effectively address these threats and help Canadians stay healthy.

Preparing Canada to address public health emergencies, infectious disease outbreaks must be balanced with efforts to prevent and control chronic diseases and to promote healthy living generally. Chronic diseases continue to be the leading cause of death and disability and a key cost driver in the health care system. Efforts to slow and prevent chronic diseases would have a significant impact on the longevity of the health care system and greatly improve overall quality of life for Canadians.

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Progress to Date

Progress on public health is being made with the establishment of the Public Health Agency of Canada, the National Collaborating Centres for Public Health and the Pan-Canadian Public Health Network – elements that are all critical to the renewal of public health in Canada. The new Chief Public Health Officer of Canada will play a leadership role in advancing public health in Canada.

All of these elements together will ensure the federal government, provinces and territories are working together on shared priorities and with a strong common purpose for our efforts in public health.