

Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century

A Sustainable Vision for Public Health

The Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century (CCPH21) is a pan-Canadian network of non-profit organizations, professional organizations, health charities and academic researchers. The Coalition's goal is to advocate for public policy to ensure adequate public health functions to protect and promote health and prevent disease and injury.

A strong public health system is the foundation to protect and enhance the health of Canadians.¹ Public health functions include:

1. health promotion
2. disease and injury prevention
3. health protection
4. health surveillance
5. population health assessment
6. emergency preparedness and response.

While recognizing that public health is delivered through the federal, provincial and territorial levels, the following list reflects the priority public health issues and responses at the national level that warrant the attention of all political parties.

Guarantee Sustained Funding for Public Health

"Without earmarked federal monies for public health, provincial/territorial spending will be drawn, as always, to personal health services and opportunities for leverage and coordination will be lost."

– *Learning from SARS: Renewal of Public Health in Canada.*¹

The federal government has taken steps over the past few years to increase funding to improve the health care delivery system; however, the gaps identified in the *Learning from SARS - Renewal of Public Health in Canada* report by David Naylor with respect to the Public Health system continue to be unresolved.¹ Canada still remains vulnerable to the risks presented by epidemics and pandemics. Attention needs to be paid to invest specifically in Canada's public health system capacity.^{2,3} This includes enhancing investments in public health research.⁴

Significant federal government achievements to date:

- Support for infrastructure for public health, as evidenced by the creation and funding in support of the Public Health Agency of Canada, and other agencies and bodies with public health-related responsibilities, such as the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer
- Fulfillment of the commitment of an annual 6% increase in the Canada Health Transfer
- Development of a national Immunization Strategy and investment of \$300 million in support of new vaccines

What remains to be done:

- Increase the percentage of total public funds invested in public health. The Naylor Report highlighted the low level of public investment in public health at the turn of the century (3.5% of total health expenditures).^{1,2} Information from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) also highlights the relatively small proportion of total funds (public and private) invested in public health (5.8% for 2007).³ Based on our expert opinion, future national investment in public health should be, at a minimum, 8% of total **public** funds invested in health spending at the federal and provincial/territorial levels
- Increase the federal commitment to national public health functions, through the lead agencies involved in public health such as the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Canadian Population Health Initiative. This should include increasing the core funding to the Public Health Agency of Canada to \$1.1 billion per year¹
- Sustain the commitment to the National Immunization Strategy with additional timely funding for new vaccines^{1,2}

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Expand Public Health Human Resources

"No attempt to improve public health will succeed that does not recognize the fundamental importance of providing and maintaining in every local health agency across Canada an adequate staff of highly skilled and motivated public health professionals. Our national aim should be to produce a cadre of outstanding public health professionals who are adequately qualified and compensated, and who have clear roles, responsibilities and career paths."

- *Learning from SARS: Renewal of Public Health in Canada*¹

The public health workforce is stretched to the limit.^{1,5} It is critical to establish a robust human resources strategy that develops an inter-professional public health workforce with skills and competencies to enhance all jurisdictions' capacity to fulfill public health functions and meet the population's health needs at all levels.^{2,6} A new pan-Canadian commitment to public health human resources is essential for Canada to effectively respond to future challenges to the health of the public.^{1,5}

Significant federal government achievements to date:

- A well-articulated human resources approach to create the "People Advantage," as outlined in the federal government's strategy *Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada's Advantage*.⁶
- The development of a framework for public health human resources planning by the Joint Task Group on Public Health Human Resources: *Building the Public Health Workforce for the 21st Century: A Pan-Canadian Framework for Public Health Human Resources Planning*.⁵
- *Core Competencies for Public Health in Canada: Release 1.0* released on-line in Fall 2007 for provision of continuing education⁷

What remains to be done:

- Implement all strategies identified in *Building the Public Health Workforce for the 21st Century: A Pan-Canadian Framework for Public Health Human Resources Planning*⁵
- Develop a long-term strategy for the renewal and sustainability of public health, beginning with a study of current skills, knowledge and practices that includes an assessment of the ability of various health professions to work collaboratively (inter-professional preparation and practice). This workforce development plan should be developed and guided by a task force of representative organizations, institutions and experts^{2,4,5}
- Increase recruitment and retention of public health practitioners to meet Canada's geographically diverse demands on public health services and expertise^{2,4,5}
- Enhance federally-funded programs to expand public health training/education
- Increase collaborative partnerships between pan-Canadian public health personnel and educational institutions^{2,6,7}
- Expand public health human resources by extending existing scholarships/grants^{2,5,6}
- Create a pan-Canadian, multi-sectoral public health human resources strategy to include a national secretariat to develop better baseline information about the workforce and enhance competence¹ as well as a joint task force to advise on public health human resources⁵
- Ensure coordination between Federal/Provincial/Territorial governments, educational institutions and community practice in order to translate public health policy, education and delivery into relevant clinical training, standards of practice, and capacity in all health settings²

Provide Continued and Enhanced Public Health Leadership

“Health care matters to all of us some of the time. Public health matters to all of us all the time.”

– Dr. C. Everett Koop
(Former U.S. Surgeon General)

The public health system has an important leadership and facilitation role to identify the factors that cause health inequalities. Though the social and economic determinants of health need special community and government attention, these are inter-related with other health determinants. The federal government needs to continue to provide leadership for the enhancement of public health capacity at the population and community levels; enhancement that includes the resolution of health inequalities.

Significant federal government achievements to date:

- Strengthened public health leadership with the creation of the Public Health Agency of Canada and the position of Chief Public Health Officer
- Recognition of the need for continued inter-jurisdictional collaboration and coordination as evidenced by the establishment of the Public Health Network

What remains to be done:

- Continue to strengthen the capacity of the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Chief Public Health Officer to monitor and report to Canadians on the risks to the public’s health and how Canada will put effective and adequate responses in place
- Provide significant incentives to enhance coordination and collaboration across sectors, systems and settings to improve the capacity and effectiveness of Canada’s public health system^{2,4,5}
- Enhance communications across all levels of government^{2,8} to enhance federal-provincial/territorial cooperation for a pan-Canadian public health system
- Include and facilitate the involvement of public health professionals and practitioners, as well as voluntary health sector organizations and professional associations in consultative mechanisms
- Articulate the role of public health in working with other sectors to influence and mitigate the negative impact of the determinants of health³, with a focus on poverty
- Develop a mechanism to monitor the effectiveness and impact of the Canadian public health system^{2,3}
- Continue investments in programs such as Canada Health Infoway (Panorama) and the electronic health record to support effective communications and collaboration in the public health and broader health community through effective uses of web-based and other technologies⁶
- Increase research on the effectiveness of public health programs, policies, and knowledge exchange strategies to nurture Canada’s advantage as a place to work and live⁶

“Ultimately, high-level leadership in all sectors – health and otherwise – is crucial to reducing health inequalities.”

– Chief Public Health Officer’s report on
*the State of Public Health in Canada*¹

References

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6. Government of Canada [2007] *Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada’s Advantage*. Canada.
7. Public Health Agency of Canada [2007] *Core Competencies for Public Health in Canada – Release 1.0*. Government of Canada: Ottawa, ON.
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Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century Supporting Members

Association of Canadian Academic Healthcare Organizations
Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
Canadian Association of Public Health Dentistry
Canadian Association for School Health
Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists
Canadian Chiropractic Association
Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion
Canadian Dental Association
Canadian Diabetes Association
Canadian Dental Hygienists Association
Canadian Healthcare Association
Canadian Medical Association
Canadian Nurses Association
Canadian Pharmacists Association
Canadian Psychological Association
Canadian Physiotherapy Association
Canadian Public Health Association
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