

## Health & Wellness

A list of broad social goals has been established as a starting point for the sustainability plan. To achieve these (and environmental and economic) goals, the City and the community have been working for some time to develop and implement a Social Development Strategy. The Strategy complements the sustainability plan in that it focuses on the actions that meet at least one of the Sustainability Plan's goals. This document summarizes our performance, and highlights the links between goals, actions and root causes.

### Description

Health can be defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being: it is not just the absence of disease or infirmity. Wellness is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a more successful existence. Important components of health and wellness include: community food security; health promotion and support services; disease prevention; injury prevention; active living and healthy eating; cultural health and safety; and spiritual health.



While health is often seen as related to doctors and hospitals, the well-being of communities actually depends on a broad range of social factors. Medical care can prolong a person's lifespan and treat a variety of illnesses, but we need to examine the reasons why people become ill in the first place. Health and illness are not simply about individual choice or about medical technology, but also are the product of socio-economic factors called the ***social determinants of health***.

These include conditions such as poverty, inadequate housing, and poorly-paid, stressful jobs. In contrast, affluence, wealth and education are often the precursors to having the time and money necessary to eat well, exercise regularly, and access the best health care.

### Status and Trends

Prince George's recent social development inventory suggested significant community efforts have been channeled into acute care, health promotion and disease prevention. The mandates of fewer agencies appear to be focused on the broader definition of health and wellness (above).

In an effort to address these broader aspects, Prince George recently committed to the ActNow BC goals to increase physical activity and healthy eating by 20% by 2010. Through rising levels of inactivity and consumption of high-calorie food, North Americans are now in the midst of an obesity epidemic. In Canada, obesity cost the taxpayer \$1.8 billion in 1997 through added pressures to the health care system. Inactivity cost the taxpayer \$2.1 billion in 1999. One way to increase physical activity is through walking or cycling from place to place – difficult given the spread-out form of Prince George. Recreation is another way, but is more difficult for people who are poor. The ActNow initiative brings a unified approach to promoting physical activity and healthy eating, another critical component of health and wellness..

Food security refers to the availability of fresh, healthy, culturally acceptable food and people's ability to access it. The issue for Prince George, as with many North American communities, is the need for high-quality food that is also affordable and accessible. Globally, while food is cheap, accessible, and varied, its nutritional value has dropped dramatically over the last 20-30 years, it brings little value to the local economy, and its production is having significant environmental impacts. Local, ethical and organic food production adds to food security, is environmentally sustainable and contributes to the local economy. The Prince George Farmer's Market Association is a good step in the right direction, but work is needed before food supplies become more secure. .

At another level is the ability of people, once they have the fresh, high-quality ingredients, to cook fresh, high-quality meals. With the advent of the fast food industry and microwave meals, many would argue that our society has lost a fundamental ability to cook and enjoy "real food". Programs such as community kitchens, teaching kitchens, parenting classes that incorporate nutrition and cooking education, Good Food Box, grocery store tours, community gardens, etc. try to ameliorate this by offering cooking classes, coaching, recipes and information to vulnerable populations. In increasingly difficult economic times, where funding is starting to dry up for such programs, Stone Soup, a collaborative supported by Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) in Northern Health, is seeking to bring the providers of such programs together to plan for sustainability and mutual support and to ensure this important food literacy component remains available in the community.

## Performance Measurement

**Of the potential measures listed below, which should we use to measure and communicate progress? Would you rather use another one? Why?**

- **Retail Food Environment Index:** A ratio describing the relative abundance of different types of retail food outlets in a given area.
- **Level of health literacy:** "Health literacy" is defined as the level to which people are able to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

- **Healthy Eating** - Percentage of residents who eat the recommended daily servings of fruit and vegetables: diet is a contributing factor for chronic conditions like heart disease, cancer, diabetes and stroke. One of the keys to proper nutrition is eating enough fruit and vegetables.
- **Proportion of Low Birth-Weight Babies:** Low birth weight is a key determinant of infant survival, health, and development. It is also a measure of good prenatal health of mothers as well as the success, or presence, of successful prenatal programs.
- **Physical activity:** Overweight and obesity have come to be recognized as a major public-health concern, related in part to nutrition, but more directly to levels of physical activity. Physical activity and obesity are central to health and wellness.
- **Life Expectancy:** Prince George residents have a shorter life expectancy than the rest of the province, at 78.5 years compared to 81 years. This suggests that the community's health is problematic, and more could be done to improve quality of life and access to health care.
- **Infant Mortality:** As one of the most popular indicators of a community's health, infant mortality rates reflect not only the health status of a population, but also the effectiveness of preventative care and the attention paid to maternal and child health. Prince George's infant mortality is higher than the rest of BC, but the gap has decreased over the past 10 years.
- **Canadian Community Health Survey Results**  
The Canadian Community Health Survey offers data, based on the self-reported health of residents of the Northern Interior Region, of which Prince George is a part. The following provides a snapshot of the results:

<b>Health Profile</b>	<b>Percentage of population</b>
Overweight	31.6%
Obese	14.8%
Probable risk of depression	9.7%
Very good or perfect functional health	78.3%
Current daily or occasional smoker	30.3%
Consume fruits and vegetables 5 or more times a day	35.2%
Life stress, "quite a lot"	22.3%
Moderately levels of physical activity	45.2%
High social support	79.3%

## Questions for Consideration

- What can be done, both in terms of implementing new policies and developing new programs, to help improve the health of the community?
- What programs and partnerships can be created to carry out thorough health promotion?
- How can Prince George anticipate and address the changing health needs of the aging population?
- What are some of the root causes of poor health in the community and how can they be addressed?
- What local programs and organizations can be supported to improve community health and deal with the related social factors?
- What can be done to improve the *social* health of the community?
- What other indicators can be used to measure Prince George's health and wellness?