

TOWARDS A CULTURE OF WELLNESS

A DISCUSSION PAPER ON HEALTH AND WELLNESS IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

November 2013



Health and Wellness



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Forward.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Factors Affecting Wellness	2
Setting a New Course.....	5
What We Would Like to Achieve.....	5

AREAS OF FOCUS:

Positive Mental Wellness	6
Being Active.....	9
Living Tobacco Free	11
Eating Well	12
Using Alcohol Responsibly	14
Closing	16
References.....	17

FORWARD

Being well is important to each and every one of us. The health and wellness of Islanders is a shared responsibility and depends on the choices we make as a province, as communities and perhaps most importantly, as individuals. We know that being well is shaped by our access to resources – income, education, employment, social supports and the social norms created by ourselves and by the people we spend our time with, such as family, friends and co-workers.

Wellness is for everyone. It is a positive approach to living that emphasizes the whole person. It is the integration of body, mind and spirit; and the appreciation that everything you do has an impact on the state of your health. Wellness has the potential to enhance the quality of life for every person.

Wellness research shows that when we do things individually and as a community to pro-actively manage our lifestyles, we are healthier, more productive and are less dependent on medical services.

The Department of Health and Wellness wants to support Islanders to increase positive habits and behaviors in order to be healthier. No matter what our current health is, we can enhance it through wellness behaviors.

The Department is developing a province-wide Wellness Strategy, designed to preserve and enhance our quality of life by supporting Islanders in their efforts to choose healthy life-long behaviours. It is critical that Islanders have a voice in developing this strategy and so we are seeking your feedback. This [discussion paper](#) provides some background on the issues that impact wellness and some proposed actions. Islanders are invited to offer their feedback on the proposed actions by completing the [survey](#). All feedback received will help shape the final recommendations put forward in the Wellness Strategy. The success of our strategy is only as strong as those who are supporting it from both a belief in its ability to create change and in their ability to be a part of the change.

The Department of Health and Wellness thanks you in advance for your participation.

INTRODUCTION

Ask any Islander if they would like to improve their personal wellness and their ability to live well at every stage of life, and the answer in the vast majority of cases will be “Yes”. However, modern life presents a number of roadblocks that can prevent healthy choices from being made. Some of these roadblocks include:

- Lack of time and energy;
- Competing demands;
- Challenges with transportation;
- Limited access to opportunities for physical activity;
- Affordability of healthy food choices;
- Lack of knowledge and skills;
- Low self esteem; and
- Difficult living and social conditions.

These challenges or roadblocks have not appeared overnight, they have been building for a number of decades as the unhealthy options continue to get more attractive. It is important that we look at creating solutions for dealing with this issue over the long term. To increase our health and vitality and delay the onset of chronic conditions, we need to take immediate action. The Wellness Strategy will focus its efforts on a number of actions over the short and medium term to address some of the barriers Islanders are facing as it relates to their wellness. It will be important, however, not to lose sight of the fact that these are issues that will require long term attention.

FACTORS AFFECTING WELLNESS

Psychological well-being is a vital component to overall health. The World Health Organization describes mental health as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, copes with the normal stresses of life, works productively and contributes to his or her communities. Positive mental health helps us to be creative, productive members of society. Even for those with mental illness, there is considerable evidence that having positive mental health and resilience (autonomy, strong social supports and good coping abilities for stress) add value to overall health and well-being. Moreover, positive mental health also contributes to our readiness for healthy lifestyle choices such as eating well, drinking less alcohol, being active and staying tobacco-free.

Changing behaviors is difficult. Improving diet, increasing our activity levels, and not smoking are important steps in achieving wellness. However, Islanders are less likely than other Canadians to be physically active and eat a healthy diet. Preventing the use of tobacco and encouraging current smokers to quit is a continuing challenge. PEI’s heavy drinking rate is consistently higher than the Canadian rate (1).

Well-being is supported by good physical and mental health. However, good physical health and good mental health do not exist in isolation. The work in these areas overlaps and links in many cases. No single direction or action on one factor, such as eating well or being active, will reduce the risk of developing a chronic disease on its own. Sustained progress in many areas will improve our well-being by enabling more Islanders to enjoy good mental health, live tobacco-free, be active, eat well and use alcohol responsibly. Learning healthy behaviors and coping skills early in life leads to a greater likelihood of being well in adulthood. We recognize the importance of promoting well-being throughout our lives and of being inclusive of all Islanders including our friends, family and community members who have existing health concerns.

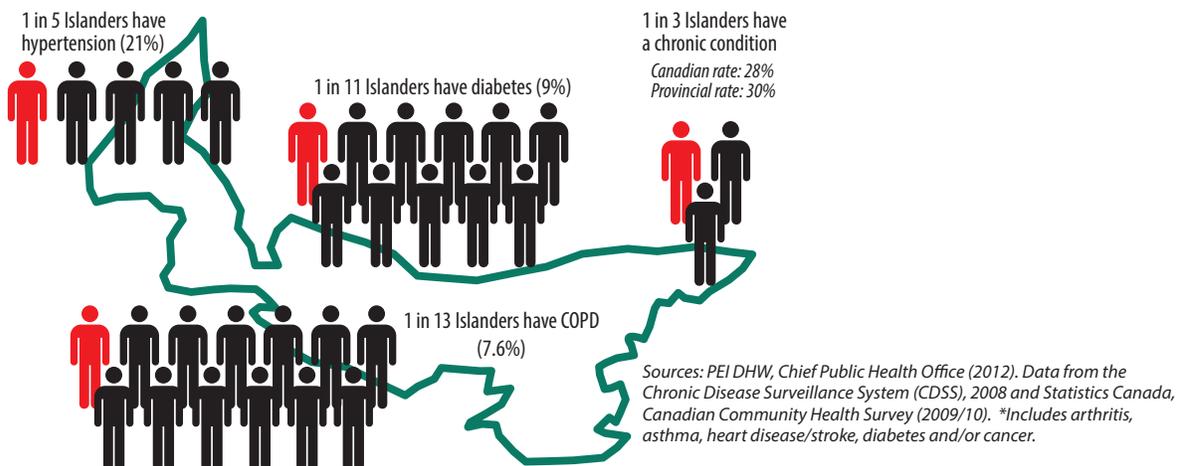
Positive Mental Health vs Mental Health Problems

Individuals with positive mental health are more likely to experience emotional well-being, life satisfaction, hopefulness, optimism, and contentment as well as enjoy a higher quality of life with improved recovery from illness, better health, quality relationships and reduced mortality. Positive mental health enables people both to cope with adversity and to reach their full potential and humanity. (2)

‘Mental health problems and illnesses’ is defined by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (2012) as a phrase that refers to the full range of patterns of behaviour, thinking or emotions that bring some level of distress, suffering or impairment in areas such as school, work, social and family interactions or the ability to live independently. The commission’s definition recognizes that there are many different kinds of mental health problems and illnesses ranging from more common issues such as anxiety and depression to less common problems and illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Importantly, even when someone develops a mental health problem or illness, they can nevertheless experience good mental health and this can contribute to their journey of recovery (3).

Promote, Prevent, Protect – PEI Chief Public Health Officer’s Report and Health Trends 2012 very clearly demonstrated the growing concern related to the rise in chronic disease in PEI (1).

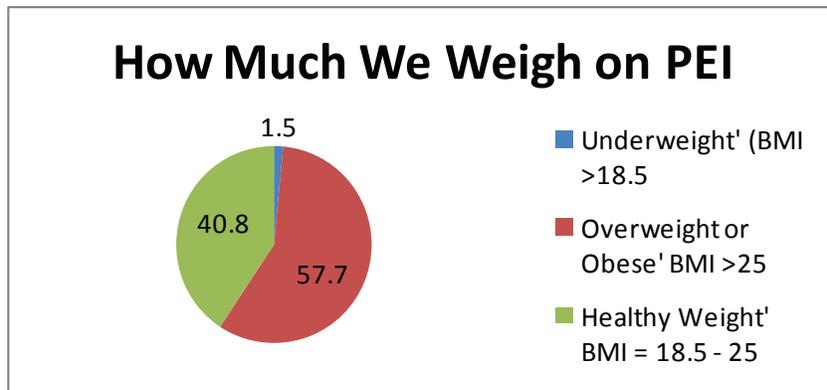
Figure 1: Chronic Disease Rates on Prince Edward Island



Approximately 30% of Islanders report having any one of the following conditions: Arthritis, asthma, heart disease and stroke, diabetes or cancer. This is higher than fellow Canadians and has a bigger impact on lower-income Islanders.

The government of PEI recognizes only too well the need for actions that will address the burden of chronic disease in our province. The Department of Health and Wellness understands that individuals living with chronic disease need to rely more heavily on our health care services than those living without these conditions (4). We also know that chronic conditions become more common as people age. Given that by 2020, 1 in 5 Islanders will be over the age of 65 and 1 in 3 by 2030 (5), the pressures on our health care system will continue to escalate.

Chronic disease is linked very closely to the risk factors mentioned earlier in this paper such as smoking, alcohol use, diet, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and obesity (6, 7, 8, and 9). We also know that people with chronic health conditions are more likely to be overweight and physically inactive (4). Once again, as revealed through the PEI Chief Public Health Officer's Report and Health Trends 2012, more than one in five Islanders are obese (21.7%) compared to the Canadian rate of 18.1% (1).



SETTING A NEW COURSE

In 2010, Ministers of Health and Healthy Living, including our own, committed to the Canadian “*Declaration on Promotion and Prevention*” to collectively declare their vision for:

...A Canada in which governments work together and with private, non-profit, municipal, academic and community sectors, and with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, to improve health and reduce health disparities and to build and influence the physical, social and economic conditions that will promote health and wellness, and prevent illness so that Canadians can enjoy good health for years to come.” (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010)

In the spirit of that commitment, and informed by the unprecedented amount of research, experience and strategies in place across the country, the province has never been in a better position to plan successful wellness initiatives. We need to use all our available resources, combined with our own local expertise, to find solutions to the challenges we face.

Importantly, we need to remember that there is a role for everyone to play in this effort. A greater focus on prevention will require a commitment to a stronger collaboration with other government departments, schools, businesses and community partners to ensure our actions are evidence based and are in line and included within other provincial initiatives and strategies.

Together, this should contribute to health and vitality and reduce preventable disease across our population. By working together, the government of Prince Edward Island, communities, business, organizations and individuals can make wellness a priority.

WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO ACHIEVE

As the Wellness Strategy develops, we will put forward actions that will place an increased focus on creating supportive environments that allow Islanders to:

- Enjoy positive mental health;
- Live in communities that support their ability to eat well and be active; and
- Consume alcohol responsibly, and lead tobacco-free lives.

The ideas being proposed for discussion in this paper are based on best available evidence and now we are seeking **YOUR** input. Islanders are invited to take part in this survey by indicating your level of agreement with the suggested actions. We also want to hear what other suggestions you have to offer in each of these areas.

Through this process, we will determine the next steps going forward while building on existing successes in Island communities. We will identify and develop innovative policies, practices and programs that can be adapted for use on Prince Edward Island.

AREAS OF FOCUS:

POSITIVE MENTAL WELLNESS

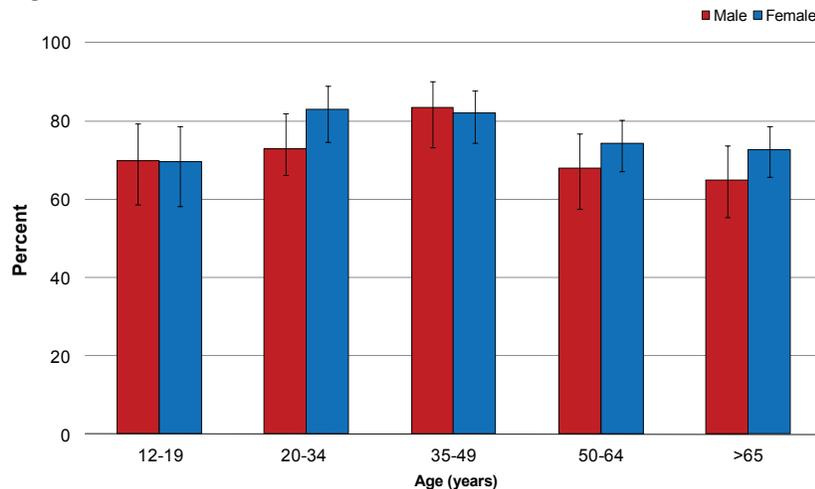
Our Goal: Increase the number of Islanders who perceive their mental wellness as excellent or very good across all ages and income groups.

Globally, research is showing that addressing mental health and mental illness as everyday issues will contribute to achieving broader goals affecting personal wellness, such as increasing employability, improving physical health,, improving academic achievement, and reducing crime. To accomplish this, work is needed both inside and outside health care and mental health settings (3, 10, and 11).

Based on the 2009-2010 assessment of mental health, approximately 75 per cent of Islanders reported their perceived mental health as excellent or very good (1). However, we know that 1 in 5 Canadians will experience a mental health problem or illness over the course of their lifetime (3). In addition, positive mental health is linked to factors affecting other behaviors that impact our physical health such as motivation, personal coping skills and how we manage stress. Those of us who are able to think, plan and act on personal decisions have an increased capacity to make positive health decisions.

Self-reported mental health is slightly lower in the 50+ age groups (1).

Self-Reported Excellent or Very Good Mental Health by Age and Sex, PEI 2009/10



“At the individual and community levels, there are many things that can be done to protect and improve mental health. Some of the simple steps that can be easily integrated into our daily activities—such as making a conscious effort to connect with people around us, being physically active or doing something to help someone else—have been shown to contribute to our individual mental well-being,” (3)

The literature is showing that the best results for mental health promotion, mental illness prevention, and suicide prevention have been achieved by initiatives that target specific groups (defined by age or other criteria) and settings (school, workplace, home) (3). Comprehensive actions have the potential to address a combination of known risk and protective factors and support communities to take action, and should be sustained over a long period of time (2, 3, 10, and 11). The strongest return on investment may be seen in children and adolescents in terms of reducing conduct disorders and depression, parenting and anti-bullying/-stigma programs, suicide awareness and prevention, health promotion in schools, and primary health care screening for depression and alcohol misuse.

As a province, it is important for us to foster good mental health within our population. Positive mental health, healthy relationships, social connections and emotional well-being are essential elements of overall health. As with the other areas of wellness, responsibility for promoting positive mental health and preventing mental illness extends across all levels of government and sectors of society (3).

Currently, some of the most effective approaches across Canada include:

- School-based programs that promote emotional and social learning
- Provincial programs to empower parents and strengthen families
- Strategies that involve collaboration across government departments to improve service delivery and promote wellness
- Creating a social movement for mental health

PROPOSED ACTIONS:

Support communities and community groups in promoting the links between mental health and physical health

- Develop a planning guide of “best practices” that can be used by these groups. It is important that we work across all sectors (community, business, governmental) to deliver education and awareness on promoting positive mental health in various settings.
- The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) specifically recommends creating opportunities to increase everyone’s understanding of how to improve their own mental health and well-being, and support communities to take action to foster mental health and well-being.

Introduce parenting education and support programs from prenatal to adolescent

- Where possible, we should intervene early and support the population in the early years. Parental support programs that focus on helping parents understand normal emotional and behavioural patterns of children and adolescents, as well as to recognize problems early and seeking help when necessary, are essential for ensuring positive mental health.
- The Mental Health Commission of Canada specifically recommends increasing support for parents and caregivers to promote healthy social and emotional development in infancy and early childhood, paying special attention to those at high risk.

Work with schools, school boards, parents, and others to find ways to promote positive mental health within schools in ways that support and complement the classroom curriculum

- Mental Health Commission of Canada specifically recommends increasing comprehensive school health and post-secondary mental health initiatives that promote mental health for all students and including targeted prevention efforts for those at risk. An example of this would be to introduce a resource such as the “Positive Mental Health Tool Kit”.

Align with national social marketing campaigns to reduce stigma and discrimination associated with mental health and addictions.

- There is a need to ensure that positive mental health and addressing mental illnesses are viewed no differently than other illnesses and disorders such as cancer or diabetes, thereby reducing barriers to seeking support when needed.
- Introducing actions to combat stigma and discrimination of mental health problems and illnesses is strongly recommended.

Explore the feasibility of adopting the national *Psychological Health and Safety* guidelines

- The *Psychological Health and Safety* guidelines are the most rigorous and comprehensive avenue available for determining what changes may be required to improve the supportive nature of a given worksite in the area of mental wellness.
- The *Psychological Health and Safety* guidelines are designed to make it easier for employees to take steps to prevent mental injury, reduce psychological risk and promote a mentally healthier workplace.



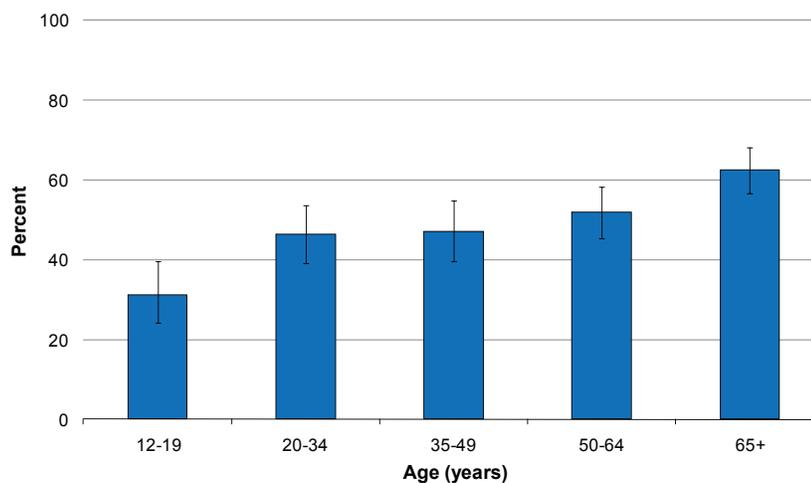
BEING ACTIVE

Our Goal: Increase physical activity levels across all ages, and income groups.

Nearly half of all Prince Edward Island residents are not meeting the recommended physical activity levels:

Understanding Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines		
Infants & Preschoolers (Age 1 – 4)	180 minutes of physical activity daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different activities in different environments • Activities that develop movement skills
Children & Youth (Age 5 – 17)	60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vigorous activities at least 3 times per week • Activities that strengthen muscles and bones at least 3 times per week
Adults and Older Adults (Age 18+)	150 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic physical activity per week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accumulate your time in at least 10 minute increments • Muscle and bone strengthening activities at least twice per week • If you have poor mobility you should work on enhancing your balance daily

Self-Reported Physical Inactivity by Age, PEI 2009/10



There were no differences between activity level in males and females. The percent of inactive residents tends to increase with age (1).

To increase our activity levels we need to create a culture of wellness in our Province that will remove barriers for participants, increase education and promote better collaboration between traditional and non-traditional physical activity partners. We also need to identify specific environments for action where we can have the greatest impact...schools, community programming opportunities and within the sport sector.

PROPOSED ACTIONS:

Deliver a province-wide physical activity program for children aged 3-6 years of age that focuses on teaching fundamental movement skills.

- Research shows children who develop the fundamental movement skills have a greater likelihood to participate in physical activity and become involved in sport.

Explore options for legislation to ensure children receive a minimum of 30 minutes of quality daily physical activity through a combination of in-school and after-school time activity.

- The school provides a positive environment to reduce sedentary behaviour and increase physical activity. There is also a strong correlation between children who are physically active and academic achievement.

Introduce an initiative where doctors and health care providers could give physical activity “prescriptions”.

- Physical activity is an important factor for reducing chronic disease, managing weight and stress. An active prescription with strong links between physicians and recreation practitioners will support Islanders in increasing their physical activity levels.
- A physical activity prescription is a tool that can be used by health care providers to promote healthy lifestyle behaviours and send a strong message about the linkage between being active and enjoying good health.

Introduce physical activity programs aimed at older adults with a focus on initiatives that enhance balance, improve mobility and prevent falls.

- By 2020, one in five Islanders will be over the age of 65 and many of the recreation programs are designed for adults and not older adults.

Develop a campaign that encourages Islanders to eat well and be active at any size by providing programs and support for those just getting started on their healthy living journey

- Making healthy living changes can benefit all Islanders regardless of their current physical situation. It is important to have safe entry points into physical activity for all Islanders.

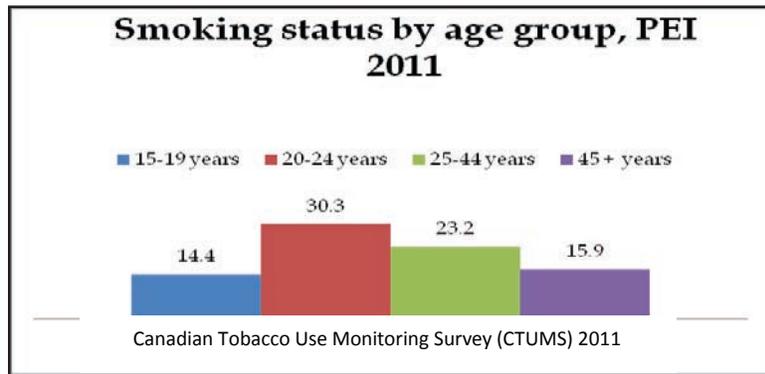
Enhance the go!PEI programming opportunities across the province and provide education and support to specific populations that may be experiencing low levels of physical activity

- Making sure programs are accessible is important and go! PEI has done a good job at opening the door for many Islanders to increase their physical activity levels and this should be strengthened.
- Launched in 2010, go!PEI has had more than 12,000 participants. There have been over 500 programs offered in 60 plus communities across the province.

LIVING TOBACCO-FREE

Our Goal: Reduce tobacco use and the harms it causes Islanders across all ages and income groupings.

Tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death and disability worldwide. Despite progress over the decades in the reduction of tobacco use, approximately 1 in 5 Islanders are current smokers. On PEI, tobacco is estimated to cost the health care system \$19.8 million per year in direct health care costs and another \$58 million in lost productivity. Smokers who quit tobacco benefit from an immediate reduction in their chances of developing chronic disease. (26)



PROPOSED ACTIONS:

Work with partners to introduce a program in high schools to prevent use of tobacco and encourage those who do smoke to quit.

- There are many reasons why it is important to prevent tobacco use among youth. Not only are smokers who begin at earlier ages more likely to become lifetime smokers, there is also a close link between tobacco use and other risk factors, including a decrease in academic achievement, and increased risk of dropping out of school (12). Beginning smoking at an early age is predictive of engaging in fighting, drug use and problems in school (13). As well, youth who remain tobacco-free do not have to deal with the difficulty of quitting smoking and have a lower risk of the chronic diseases associated with smoking.

Improve access to supports for quitting smoking within community and health care settings

- Evidence shows that brief advice and counseling will help improve the rate of success when attempting to quit smoking (14).

Improve access to cessation medications and nicotine replacement therapies.

- Research shows that the combination of counseling and medication is more effective than either intervention on its own and is “highly cost-effective relative to interventions for other clinical disorders.” (15)

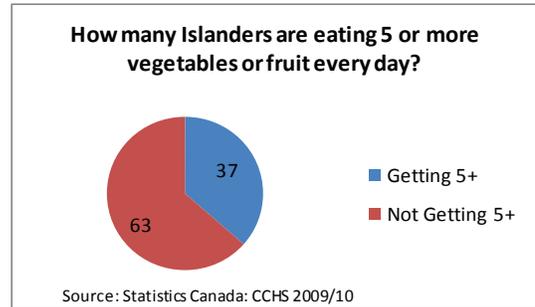
Work with partners to support communities across the Island to adopt a policy restricting tobacco use on public grounds

- Smoke-free public grounds promote healthy living, prevent exposure to second-hand smoke, and create an environment free of litter from cigarettes.

EATING WELL

Our Goal: Increase life-long healthy eating behaviors across all ages and income groupings.

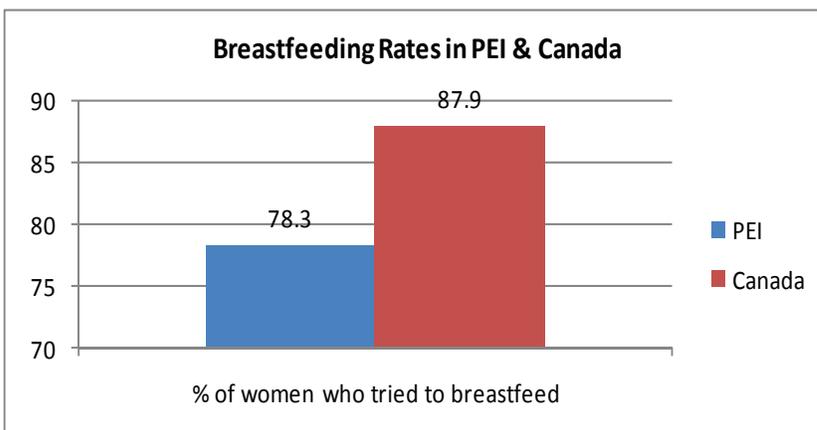
Eating a well-balanced and nutritious diet is essential for good health but it can be hard in today's modern food environment. A lack of affordable healthy food choices can make it difficult for some to eat a healthy diet. To make sure healthy food choices are easier to make we have to look at improving the environments where healthy food is available. This will require us to focus our policies and our public education efforts on the settings where food is served (homes, schools, community events, restaurants) so that Islanders have the knowledge, skills and resources to make healthy food choices.



We know that more than a third (35%) of the sugar that Canadians consume comes from the added sugars in foods, such as soft drinks and candy, opposed to sugar that occurs naturally in fruits, vegetables and milk. (25)

In 2009/10, 37% of Islanders over the age of 12 were eating fruits or vegetables five or more times a day. This is lower than the Canadian rate of 44% (1). We also know that 65% of youth in Prince Edward Island reported eating high fat, salty, or sugar snacks or drinks three times or more per day (13).

The Department of Health and Wellness supports breastfeeding as the optimal form of nutrition for newborns given its benefits on infant growth, immunity, and cognitive development. Breast milk contains ideal nutrients to allow proper digestion, brain development and growth. (1) In 2008, 70.6% of newborns in PEI were breastfed either exclusively or in combination with formula at the time of hospital discharge. This marks a considerable increase from 1990 when 48% of newborns were breastfed upon hospital discharge. However, Islanders continue to fall behind Canadian rates (87%).



Breastfeeding rates are also lower among Island mothers compared to the Canadian average (1).

Sources: ISM Public Health Nursing database and Vital Statistics Birth Registrations (2006-2008); Breastfeeding Initiation in Canada: Key Statistics and Graphics (2007 & 2008)

PROPOSED ACTIONS:

Adopt a province wide “baby friendly initiative” and public education campaign to increase support of breastfeeding.

- Breastfeeding is seen as the best way to start all children on the path to health. Breastfeeding rates are lower on PEI than the rest of Canada. Creating a ‘baby friendly environment’ where women feel comfortable and safe breastfeeding is one way to encourage more women to breastfeed (24).

Create and implement healthy living policies (e.g. Healthy Workplace Policy, Healthy Meeting & Events Policy, Healthy Canteen Policy) for publicly-funded facilities and events.

- Healthy public policy is a starting point for making the healthy choice the easier choice. They can send a strong message about what government values. PEI has invested in the development of school nutrition policies and healthy living policies in early childhood centres. Following the example set by other Canadian jurisdictions and around the world, other public settings is a natural next step.

Educate and inform Islanders of the impact that increased consumption of sugar sweetened beverages has on overweight and obesity

- Presently, sugar-sweetened beverages are targeted, among others, by the World Health Organization (27) and the Government of Canada as one of the major contributors to the current obesity epidemic.

Introduce an “Informed Dining Program” in chain restaurants that will provide consumers with consistent nutritional information.

- By law, all packaged foods must have nutrition labels that tell us what is in each serving (e.g. calories, fat, sugar, salt, etc.). Some chain restaurants also have this information available. An informed dining program would make sure that participating chain restaurants had the same information found on packaged foods available to customers. Customers would then know exactly what is in their meal.



USING ALCOHOL RESPONSIBLY

Our Goal: To reduce heavy drinking behaviors among Islanders.

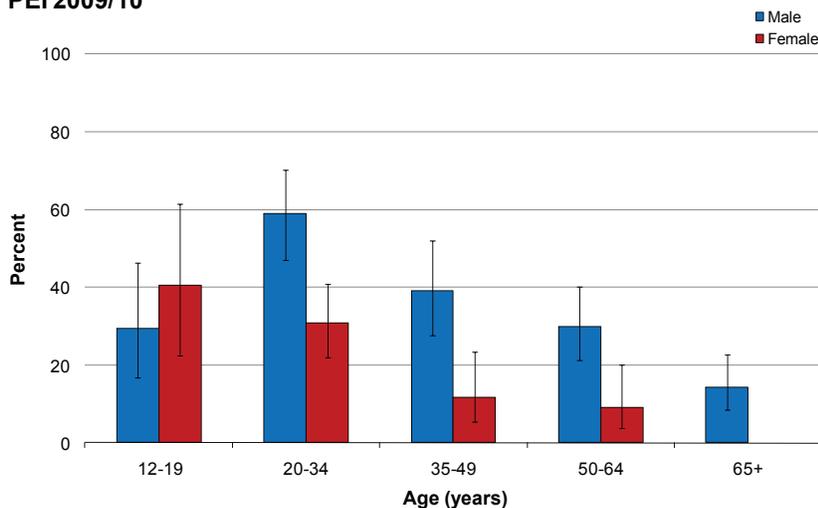
Alcohol misuse is a significant negative contributor to population health. In terms of the burden of illness at the population level, the impact of alcohol is next after tobacco (16). Many people associate the risks of alcohol with consequences related to drinking and driving, but excessive use of alcohol can lead to many health and social problems.

Most Islanders know and have seen or experienced alcohol-related harms – disorderly behaviour, public drunkenness, under-aged drinking, violence, addiction, criminal activity, and injuries. A growing body of research clearly places alcohol use as one of four common risk factors, along with tobacco use, poor diet and physical inactivity, for the four main groups of chronic diseases – heart diseases, cancer, chronic lung diseases and diabetes (16)

In 2009/10, 26% of PEI residents who consumed alcohol in the last twelve months reported heavy drinking (1). PEI's heavy drinking rate is consistently higher than the Canadian rate (1). We have a growing understanding that the harms associated with excessive alcohol consumption directly affects our communities as they involve our neighbourhoods and roads, our sense of safety and wellbeing, our children, families and friends (17 and 18).

We must work towards creating a new normal for alcohol consumption. Policies to address alcohol-related harms can include implementing specific strategies, supporting priorities, or implementing local interventions. (17, 18, and 19).

Self-Reported Heavy Drinking by Age and Sex, PEI 2009/10



Heavy drinking rates are significantly higher for males (38%) than females (17%). For example, in the 20-34 age grouping, 59% of males reported heavy drinking compared to 31% of females.

PROPOSED ACTIONS:

Adopt Canada's Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines in partnership with health service providers

- The World Health Organization (WHO) Global Strategy promotes the screening and brief interventions to change hazardous patterns of drinking and conducting information and educational campaigns in support of effective policy measures (16)
- Over the past 20 years there have been four sets of drinking guidelines in Canada—from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Centre for Addictions Research of British Columbia, Educ'alcool and the College of Family Physicians of Canada—resulting in Canadians receiving mixed information and guidance. A standardized set of guidelines is important to provide consistent, current information across Canada to help people make informed choices and moderate their drinking (20).

Reinforce/enhance policies designed to limit the marketing and promotion of alcohol to youth at cultural/sporting events.

- The WHO Global Strategy promotes regulating or banning marketing of alcoholic beverages and conducting information and educational campaigns in support of effective policy measures (16)
- Promoting local alcohol-free events, for example, municipal celebrations for New Year's Eve that don't involve sale or consumption of alcohol is a recommendation of Atlantic Collaborative on Injury Prevention (21).

Introduce campaigns to raise awareness of alcohol as a public health issue.

- The WHO Global Strategy promotes conducting information and educational campaigns in support of effective policy measures (16)

Support initiatives to reduce impaired driving rates.

- The WHO Global Strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol, promotes using effective prevention of drink-driving measures (16)
- Multiple sources recommend giving priority to education, supporting policies, improving controls and enforcement of impaired driving rules and legislation in addressing alcohol-related harms (17 and 21).

Develop messages targeted at under-age drinkers and their parents/ young adults who over drink or binge drink, women who are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.

- The WHO Global Strategy consistently promote screening and brief interventions to change hazardous patterns of drinking. They also support conducting information and educational campaigns in support of reducing alcohol-related harms (16, 17, 20, and 21).

IN CLOSING

We face significant challenges to create a culture of wellness in this Province. We have increasing rates of chronic diseases and rising health care costs. Due to social, economic and environmental realities, the healthy choice is often not the easy choice. Healthy eating, physical activity and reduction and control of tobacco use have only seen moderate success with prior work under the 2003 Strategy for Healthy Living. There are also emerging pressures in the realm of mental wellness and alcohol use which require attention.

In 2009/10, 58% of Islanders over the age of 15 indicated that they intended to do something to improve their health (1). Let's create the environment, provide the support and the programs that allows them to succeed, because the healthier we are as individual Islanders, the stronger we are as a Province!

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