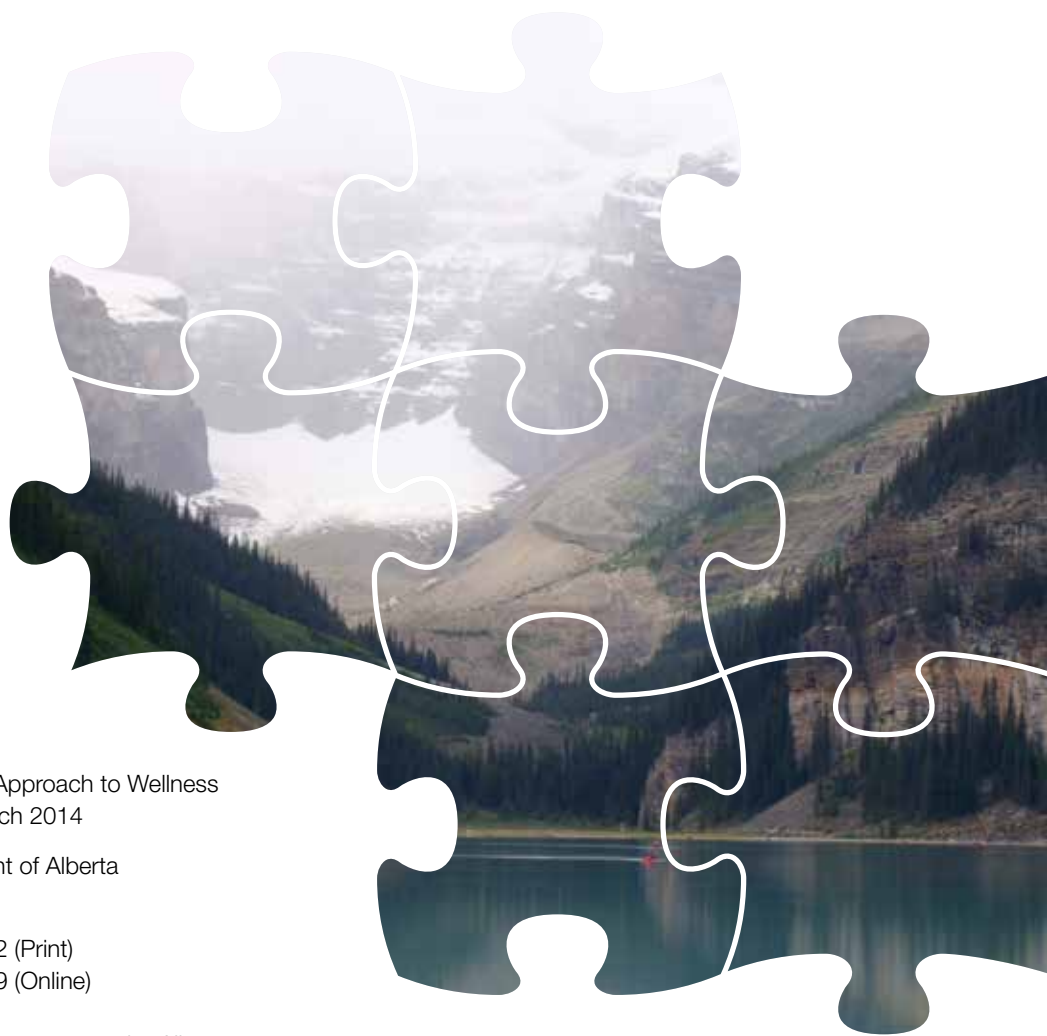


# Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness

*Health for All*

*... Wellness for Life*





Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness  
Alberta Health, March 2014

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# Message from the Associate Minister of Wellness and the Chief Medical Officer of Health

When we start a conversation with someone we haven't met in a while, the first question we ask is "How are you?" Their immediate response often is "I am doing well, thank you." Next the talk will turn naturally to a birth in the family, children starting school, someone getting married, starting a new job, buying a new home or taking care of a loved one. That conversation is really about our health – our wellness. Our health and wellness are so fascinating and important to us that they dominate our conversations with one another. It's why we say, "If you have your health you have everything!"

Today, our conversations about health are less often about that kind of health and wellness – and more often about health care. Most Albertans are familiar with our system of health care – the system of hospitals, doctors, nurses and other professionals we turn to when we are sick or injured. While having a strong health care system and treating disease and illness are important, there are many other factors that contribute to our overall wellness.

It's time to have a different conversation: a conversation that begins long before we are sick or diagnosed with a disease. A conversation that shifts the dialogue from the delivery of health care – to a discussion about our health and wellness. Health is not simply the absence of illness and disease, but as something we build with our families, schools, communities and workplaces, in our parks and playgrounds, the places we live, the air we breathe, the water we drink and the choices we make.

The words health and wellness can tell us a lot about the kind of conversation we want to have. The word health comes from the Old English word for whole and the word wellness comes from the Old English word for wealth – together they tell us that we are at our best when we are whole: when our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual states are healthy. It is what enables us to work, play, build, innovate, imagine and love. Our health and wellness are the true wealth of our province.

The more we begin to see wellness this way, the more opportunities we have to improve it. It is also clear that we all have a role in creating wellness. Parents who ensure that their children eat fresh fruits and vegetables – create wellness. Community members who join the neighbourhood watch program, so that their neighbourhoods are safe and secure – create wellness. Urban planners who design walkable neighbourhoods – create wellness. Staff and volunteers at an inner city agency, assisting the homeless with food and shelter – create wellness. Government poverty elimination programs for individuals and families – create wellness. All of us working together – creates wellness – individuals, families, communities, faith-based and non-governmental organizations, businesses,

and governments. Our success depends on how we build relationships to work together and create communities and environments that support and improve our health and wellness.

We are currently facing threats to our health that may roll back the gains in increased life expectancy we have achieved in the past 100 years. Rates of chronic disease and injury continue to rise in Alberta and across the country. The prevalence of obesity is so great, especially in children, that there is a good likelihood that this generation of children will become sick with preventable diseases like diabetes, heart disease, kidney failure and cancer at much earlier ages and be reliant on the health system for much longer than their parents ever were. We have to ask ourselves are we prepared to accept that future?

The rise in preventable illnesses can also be linked to an increase in health spending. Canada is experiencing an average increase of 3% in health spending per year and currently spends approximately \$5,800 per person. Alberta meanwhile has one of the highest health expenditures rates per capita in Canada at just over \$6,500. Most of this is spent when we are sick or diagnosed with a disease. We need to get the balance right in preventing disease from happening at all.

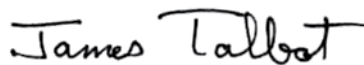
The task of improving health and wellness may seem daunting. But we believe we are up to the challenge. Alberta is a great province and so are its people. Together we can create opportunities for Albertans to live long healthy lives.

Moving forward, we need to have a wider conversation with Albertans about health and explore the possibilities and opportunities we have to build a healthier Alberta.

This conversation will help us get there. This is a journey worth travelling – to imagine a world better than this one and then create it. Are we up to it?



Dave Rodney  
Associate Minister of Wellness



James Talbot  
Chief Medical Officer of Health

# What Is Health and Wellness?

Albertans value good health care. We want to know that we can see a family doctor quickly and avoid long waits in the emergency room. We want to know that our elderly loved ones can get the support they need to live independently. We want to know that treatment is available within days of being diagnosed with cancer. However, we also need to focus on the factors that keep us healthy. Often the best cure is not getting sick or injured in the first place.

Our health and wellness is deeply rooted in all aspects of our lives and how we live each and every day. It is what allows us to create, to work, make decisions and build the lives we dream of – to connect with each other and to contribute to our families and communities. Our health and wellness is everything.

We recognize seven dimensions to wellness.

Do these make sense to you?

**Social wellness:** positive relationships with family, friends, and community members

**Physical wellness:** taking care of your body by making informed decisions

**Emotional wellness:** positive feelings about yourself, sharing your feelings and being optimistic

**Occupational wellness:** satisfaction with your job, working in a healthy environment, balancing work and family life

**Intellectual wellness:** engaging in stimulating activities, expanding knowledge and abilities

**Environmental wellness:** living in and supporting a clean and safe environment

**Spiritual wellness:** living a meaningful and purposeful life

*What does health mean to you?*

- *Living in a safe neighbourhood where my kids can walk to school without feeling afraid?*
- *Drinking water from my kitchen tap knowing that the water is safe to drink?*
- *Being able to buy fresh fruit and vegetables in my neighbourhood and cook healthy food for family?*
- *Being able to walk my dog in the park close to my house and have him introduce me to my neighbours?*
- *Having enough money each month so I can pay my bills and look after my family?*
- *Feeling happy about my life, enjoying time with my friends and family and being able to do things in my community?*
- *Being able to volunteer every Sunday at the community garden?*

## What Makes us Healthy?

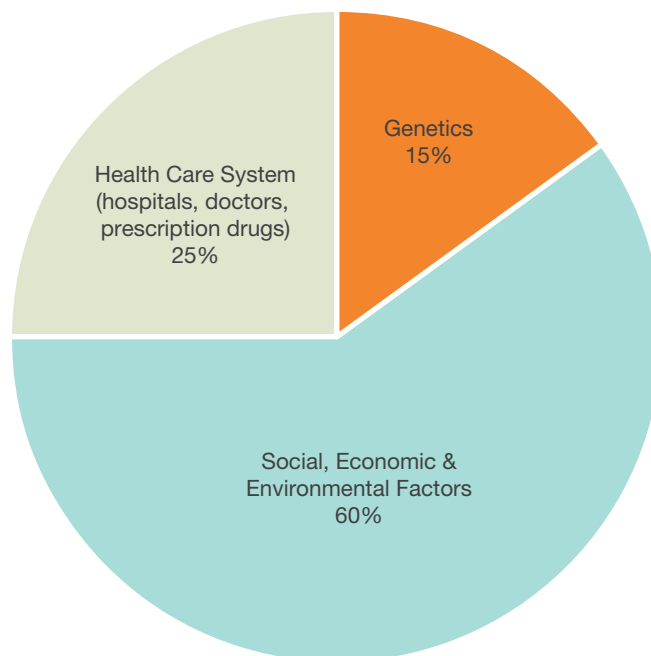
Experts estimate that about 15% of our health is the result of our biology and the genes we inherit from our parents, which play an important role in determining our physical characteristics, personality traits and whether or not we get sick. The remaining 85% of our health is within our control – and it is estimated that 60% of our health can be attributed to social, economic and environmental factors.

This means our health is largely influenced by whether we have enough money to meet our basic needs, access to safe and affordable housing, meaningful educational and employment opportunities, access to healthy food, nurturing early life experiences, the design and safety of our communities and clean air and safe drinking water (See Appendix: Factors that Affect our Health and Wellness).

Our health and wellness is also influenced by our individual behaviours. Actions that we take as individuals like eating healthy, exercising regularly and avoiding harmful behaviours such as smoking are important in keeping us healthy.

However, we do not live in isolation and we cannot separate individuals from their environment. The choices we make are greatly influenced by the environments in which we live, learn, work and play.

The more we begin to think in this way, the more we see that traditional programs focused on healthy eating, physical activity and smoking cessation are not enough to bring about health and wellness in a community. We also see that health is not the sole domain of the Government of Alberta. Health is everyone's business: individuals, families, communities, service providers, community and professional organizations, industry and all levels of government.



# Do We Have the Right Balance?

## Investing in Prevention vs. Health Care

Advancements in public health measures and medical science have resulted in significant gains in both the duration and quality of life. Albertans value good health because healthy people and healthy communities ensure our future progress and prosperity. Looking to the future, increasing challenges and pressures on our health care system will make it difficult to continue meeting our health goals. Today, we are facing threats to our health that may roll back the gains in life expectancy that we have achieved in the past 100 years. In order to ensure that we continue to be healthy, we need to change the way we think about health.

### Health care is an expensive proposition...

Total health care spending in Canada amounted to approximately \$207 billion in 2012, averaging \$5,948 per person. In the past decade, provincial and territorial governments have experienced a 5% per capita increase in health care spending per year<sup>1</sup>.

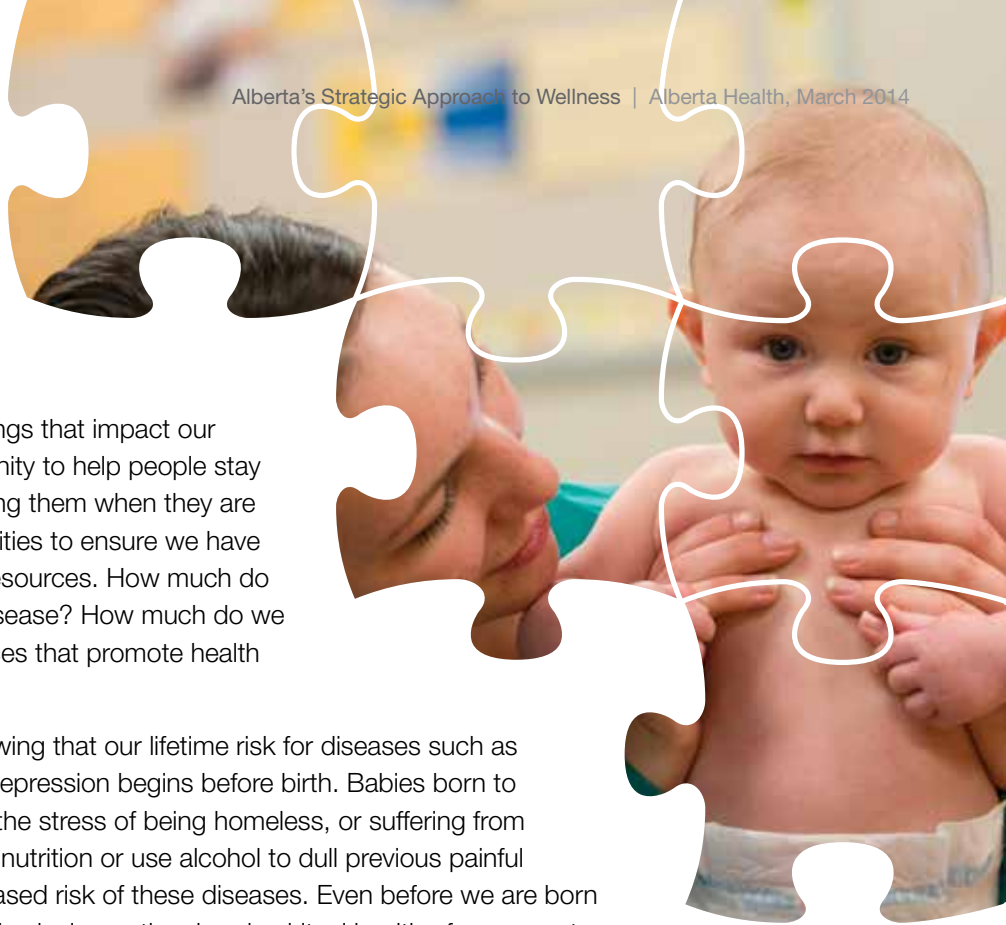
In 2013/2014, the Government of Alberta will spend \$17.1 billion on health care, accounting for 45% of total provincial expenditures. This means that every day we spend \$47 million on health care or \$2 million every hour. Health care spending has increased by 10% annually in the last decade, with hospitals, drugs, and physician services accounting for the largest share of health dollars<sup>2</sup>. If health care spending does not change in the next few years, we could be spending half the province's budget on health care. This escalating spending on health is pushing aside spending on other important areas like education, infrastructure and social services.

It is important that we continue to invest in the health care system and make improvements to ensure that Albertans receive the best care possible. But health care – focused on illness, diagnosis, treatment and care – is not enough.

### The best cure is not getting sick or injured in the first place.

The rates of chronic disease and injury continue to rise in Alberta.

- The number of individuals living with diabetes has almost doubled in the last decade, with approximately 218,000 people now living with the disease.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2011, over 162,000 Albertans suffered with ischemic heart disease and this number is expected to continue to rise.<sup>4</sup>
- Over 14% of the Alberta population have been diagnosed with hypertension, an increase of approximately 3% since 2001.<sup>5</sup>



Knowing what we know about the things that impact our health, we have an incredible opportunity to help people stay healthy and well rather than just treating them when they are sick. This requires examining our priorities to ensure we have the right balance in the allocation of resources. How much do we invest in treating and managing disease? How much do we invest in policies, programs and services that promote health and prevent disease?

Medical and scientific research is showing that our lifetime risk for diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and depression begins before birth. Babies born to mothers that have been subjected to the stress of being homeless, or suffering from depression or anxiety, who have poor nutrition or use alcohol to dull previous painful experiences, automatically have increased risk of these diseases. Even before we are born our health is affected by the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health of our parents. Further studies have shown that when these same babies in turn become parents they will have babies who are subject to the same stresses. Poor health and wellness often become hereditary.

The good news is that effective interventions to reverse these stresses exist. Reducing homelessness, improving income, improving nutrition, decreasing depression and addiction and being compassionate to those less fortunate than us improves health and wellness and prevents disease. It also prevents bad outcomes being passed on to the next generation.

These interventions provide a return on investment by decreasing injuries, crime, health care costs and lost human potential. They result in a more educated and productive workforce, improved community resilience, better nourished and fit individuals, families and communities. And they pay off for generations. That's why the wellness of Albertans and their communities is the real wealth of Alberta.


# Wellness and the Social Policy Framework

In 2012, the Government of Alberta asked Albertans to help create a social policy framework. The result – *Alberta's Social Policy Framework* – is a vision for social policy that defines who we are as people and communities, one that reflects our aspirations for a province that offers all Albertans the opportunity to reach their potential and to benefit from the highest possible quality of life. The Social Policy Framework engagement found that Albertans want to talk about health.

Albertans identified health as one of the most important issues, with over 70% of Albertans agreeing with the statement that “promoting good health is as important as treating illness.” Albertans also emphasized that everyone has a role to play in creating a healthy society and that communities are essential partners in finding solutions to social problems. They also strongly emphasized the need to be proactive and take a preventative approach to social issues, recognizing that preventative approaches are often difficult to measure and require long-term commitment.

*Alberta's Social Policy Framework* and *Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness* share a common vision. When we use public transportation, participate in a community program, take our children to a local park, when we are able to access safe and affordable housing, when we feel a sense of inclusion and safety in our communities and when employment and skill-building opportunities are available to us we are benefiting from the social policies of government. It may be surprising to know that these social policies play a really important role in keeping us healthy. Simply stated, social policy is health policy!

Key Actions being undertaken under the Social Policy Framework, including but not limited to, the poverty reduction strategy, the work on early childhood development and homelessness and the development of family care clinics will have significant impacts on the health of Albertans.



*“Social Policy is about how we meet human needs – needs like housing, employment, nurturing, safety, and security and child care. Social policy can be expressed in how we care for and about one another and how individuals, communities and governments come together to address social issues. Social policy includes actions, guidelines, principles, laws and regulations. It involves creating conditions to maintain a minimum standard of wellbeing for Albertans, ensuring the fair treatment of individuals and providing services to people in need”.<sup>6</sup>*

## Why is a Strategic Approach to Wellness Important?

We are facing threats to our health like never before. This generation of children will likely continue to live long lives but if current rates of childhood obesity continue, the difference will be that they will be sicker earlier and for longer than their parents. The prevalence and severity of obesity is so great, especially in children, that the associated diseases and complications – Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, kidney failure, cancer, are striking people at younger and younger ages. How many of us could stand to see our children live with illness and a poorer quality of life if we could help prevent it?

Wellness is about the quality of life every Albertan is able to experience. Over time we have learned a lot about why some people are well and others are not. Our wellness is affected by our personal behaviours and by the communities in which we live. Moving unhealthy people to healthy communities improves their health: moving healthy people to unhealthy communities decreases their health!

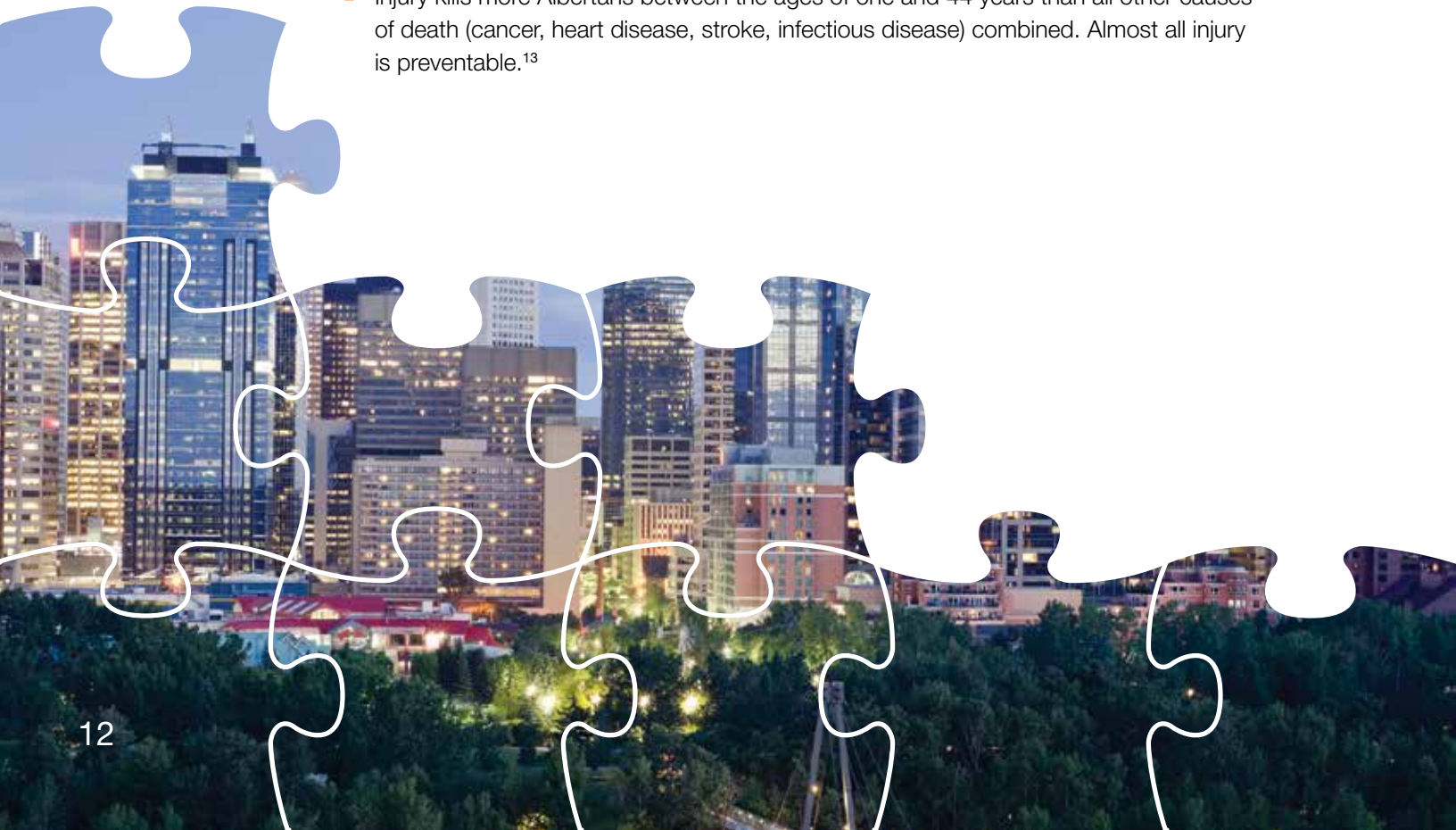


## Personal Behaviours and Wellness

We know that physical inactivity, poor eating habits and inadequate sleep are linked to weight gain and obesity, learning difficulties, decreased performance and development of chronic diseases. The rise in mental health issues in Alberta is taking a toll on individuals and their families, especially children. Injuries are also contributing to increased absenteeism and lower productivity at work. The economic impact on the health system is staggering.

Action is needed to increase Albertans' knowledge and skills to practice behaviours that will help them to be as healthy as possible for as long as possible. In Alberta,

- More than 50% of individuals over the age of 12 do not eat the daily recommended number of fruit and vegetables. Doing so would decrease obesity, diabetes and cancer.<sup>7</sup>
- 44% of individuals over the age of 12 are not physically active enough to achieve health benefits and more than 50% of Albertans 20-64 are overweight or obese. Exercise is known to improve mental health and decreases the risk of heart attacks and osteoporosis.<sup>8</sup>
- Almost 20% of individuals have trouble going to sleep or staying asleep most or all of the time. This decreases energy for work or for life and increases injury rates.<sup>9</sup>
- Approximately 19% of Albertans over the age of 12 misuse tobacco<sup>10</sup> and 13% drink excessively<sup>11</sup>. The link to lung cancer, emphysema, chronic bronchitis and liver cirrhosis, violent injury and motor vehicle collisions is clear.
- 25% of Albertans 18 years and older report quite a lot or extreme stress in their lives. The link between stress and poor mental health is apparent and research shows very strong links to increased rates of heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Children exposed to toxic stress have increased rates of physical and mental illness for their entire lives.<sup>12</sup>
- Injury kills more Albertans between the ages of one and 44 years than all other causes of death (cancer, heart disease, stroke, infectious disease) combined. Almost all injury is preventable.<sup>13</sup>



## Communities and Wellness

The actions and behaviours that people need to take to be well can be supported or hindered by the circumstances in which they live. A neighbourhood watch program or lower speed limits and speed bumps in communities can make them safer for children to get the 60 minutes a day of exercise that they need. The environmental, social, and economic condition of the community, along with the political processes that shape those conditions all can harm or help wellness of the individuals and families that live in that community. People who lack access to adequate housing or affordable and healthy food, and those who do not feel safe in their neighbourhood or connected to their community often experience poorer health and wellness throughout their lives.

- Nearly 400,000 Albertans live in poverty, of which 73,000 are children. Poverty is known from studies world-wide to be the single biggest contributor to life-long poor health.<sup>14</sup>
- One out of every 10 Alberta households is food insecure. These households often experience uncertainty of having, or are unable to acquire, enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they don't have enough money to buy food. They often experience hunger and are at risk for diets that are deficient in vitamins and minerals needed for health.<sup>15</sup>
- 94% of Albertans are not satisfied with their personal safety from crime.<sup>16</sup>
- 37% of renters and 16% of homeowners spend 30% or more of their incomes on shelter.<sup>17</sup>
- 65% of Albertans aged 15 years and over do not participate in social activity groups.<sup>18</sup>

## The Bottom Line

Wellness is ultimately about the quality of life experienced by Albertans regardless of where they live, work, learn or play in the province. Our health and wellness are about reaching our full potential to contribute meaningfully as an individual, family, and community. It's about us and our children having the knowledge and skills to build healthy behaviours and build communities that help us do that. It's clear from the above that we can and must do a better job. How can we do this together?

# Vision and Guiding Principles

All Albertans want to experience wellness and realize their fullest potential as individuals, families and communities. *Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness* sets forth a vision, guiding principles and an approach that will guide future actions to ensure that all Albertans have the same opportunity to experience good health.

## Vision



## Guiding Principles

Principles guide the decisions, behaviour and actions of the different partners involved in promoting the health of Albertans. For example, the government may use these principles when designing programs or legislation, while a community organization may use these principles to determine if their programs are aligned with the *Strategic Approach to Wellness*. When used as a foundation for action, a common set of principles helps everyone understand the appropriate direction to take and how to act in a way that will lead us to the outcomes we want. Understanding why certain principles have been adopted can help change attitudes, increase awareness about current challenges and identify goals for policy, legislation and service delivery.

*Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness* is based on the following beliefs and values that will guide decisions, behaviours and actions of all who are committed to improving wellness in Alberta:

- **Dignity and Mutual Respect:** It is crucial that all Albertans have a voice in the conversation about wellness. Recognizing that different values and perspectives are inevitable, it is important to approach such conversations with the understanding that everyone has something to contribute. Despite the potential for disagreement, a healthier tomorrow for all Albertans must remain the end goal.
- **Practice Inclusion:** Inclusion means ensuring that everyone has a seat at the table and an opportunity to contribute and be heard. Some groups have 'quieter' voices than others – we need to make efforts to ensure that all people feel that they can contribute in conversations about wellness, and that their contribution is included in any plan or strategy moving forward.

- **Respect for Diversity:** Respect for diversity means recognizing that our province is made up of people with a wide range of values, and that differing opinions are valuable. Diversity can pertain to people, cultures, and values; and can often result in a diversity of solutions to problems.
- **Social Justice and Equity:** Many chronic diseases and other risk factors for poor physical, social and mental health affect certain groups of Albertans more than others. These differences in health are often linked to their access to the conditions (e.g. healthy food, good housing, safe neighbourhoods) that support health. Social justice and equity is about everyone having the opportunity to “attain their full health potential” and creating equal opportunities for good health and reducing avoidable and unfair differences in health among Albertans.
- **Shared Responsibility:** We are all partners in promoting the health of Albertans. Fruitful relationships are built on principles of open communication and mutual respect – even when we disagree.
- **Evidence-based:** Whenever possible, we want to learn from both the mistakes and successes of others. We also need to regularly review the programs and policies that are used in Alberta. Evidence from many sources must be evaluated to help give the best possible direction to activities aimed at promoting health in our communities.
- **Collaboration:** We need to work together. Our capacity to achieve depends on our ability to work together as individuals, communities, governments and organizations across all sectors. When we act collaboratively, we are open to new ideas, different perspectives and solutions. The words “we” or “us” refer to all Albertans and reinforce the collaborative nature of the process. This is “our” strategy and plan.
- **Community Engagement and Mobilization:** Community engagement means taking action towards positive community change and decision-making which reflects community needs and desires. Mobilization is based on the belief that when a community is mobilized to address and solve its own problems, more efficient and effective results are achieved than could be achieved by any other means. It is characterized by the creation of a shared vision, a common understanding of the problem, leadership and establishing collaborative partnerships, increased participation and sustainability.
- **Accountable:** Accountability is accepting responsibility for – and supporting efforts to achieve – better outcomes for all Albertans. When we are accountable, we strive to be innovative and provide the highest quality possible. Transparency, citizen engagement and decisions that are based on knowledge and evidence are key aspects of an accountable system.
- **Proactive:** Proactive approaches work over the long term to prevent or address threats to our health before they start. As a result, they often prove to be more cost-effective than reactive approaches. Proactive action acknowledges the interconnectedness of individuals, families, communities and their environments. When we are proactive, we emphasize root causes and focus on creating conditions for success and we anticipate and adapt to changing and evolving needs.

## Framework to Support Action

Creating a healthier province than we have now is the most important challenge that faces us. This challenge will require all of us working together to be successful and it will benefit not just us but future generations. To get there we need to create an action plan that is clear on what our goals are, how we are going to achieve them, and who we will work with.

To begin that conversation we have talked to the experts and studied their answers. Over the past two years Alberta Health has conducted forums with broad multi-stakeholder representation to talk about *Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness*. They said that creating a shared understanding of health and wellness and taking a population health approach that recognizes the social, economic and environmental factors that contribute to health and wellness are essential components of an effective strategy. They also acknowledged the vital role that individuals, families, communities, community and professional organizations, industry and all levels of government have in taking action on health and wellness in Alberta.

What follows is not etched in stone. As we continue the conversation with Albertans we can modify these and make them work for us. However they are meant to be a starting place for the discussion.

### Outcomes – What We Want To Achieve

We will strive to achieve the following outcomes:

- Create communities that support health and wellness
- Enhance every Albertans' quality of life
- Prevent disease and injury
- Promote health and wellness
- Prolong life expectancy



## Strategies – How We Are Going To Do This

The five strategies we can use to achieve these outcomes are:

1. Improving the health knowledge, skills and behaviours of individuals and families
2. Building communities that create wellness
3. Improving social and economic supports for wellness
4. Strengthening primary prevention with primary health care
5. Building healthy public policy

### 1. Improving the Health Knowledge, Skills and Behaviour of Individuals and Families

We all have a role to play when it comes to improving our health. Beginning with taking responsibility to protect our own health and the health of our families. This means that we need access to information and opportunities to develop the life skills necessary to prevent disease, promote self-care, build healthy relationships, cope with challenges, make decisions and solve problems. Enabling and supporting people to learn throughout life, to prepare them for all of its stages and challenges is essential. This happens in our schools, in our homes, at work and in our communities.

### 2. Building Communities That Create Wellness

Our communities link us to the broader structures and institutions that affect our lives. People living in healthy communities have a sense of belonging and connectedness to each other, as well as access to resources and skills that can be mobilized to support their ability to make healthy life choices. Building healthy communities begins with ensuring that our living and working conditions are safe, clean and enjoyable. Our physical activity levels are influenced by conditions such as the proximity of recreational spaces, agreeable scenery, and street and neighbourhood design.

A well-designed transportation system can contribute to lower rates of motor vehicle crashes and pedestrian injury, decreased social isolation, increased access to employment opportunities and health services. Having good quality housing can decrease health problems by lowering associated risks such as violence, exposure to toxins, mould, virus and pests and psychological stress.



### 3. Improving Social and Economic Supports For Wellness

Supportive environments are those in which we recognize our responsibility to take care of each other, our communities and our natural environment. A supportive environment has physical, social, political, and economic dimensions, and all of these aspects interact to exert a powerful influence on our health.

The physical environment provides key things we need to live and be healthy: air, water, food and shelter. It also addresses the built environment (e.g. roads and buildings). Social support describes the help and assistance that we receive from our family, friends and wider social networks. It also links to informal, community-based supports and the availability of quality programs and resources. Finally, the economic dimension brings factors such as employment, unemployment and income.

### 4. Strengthening Primary Prevention with Primary Health Care

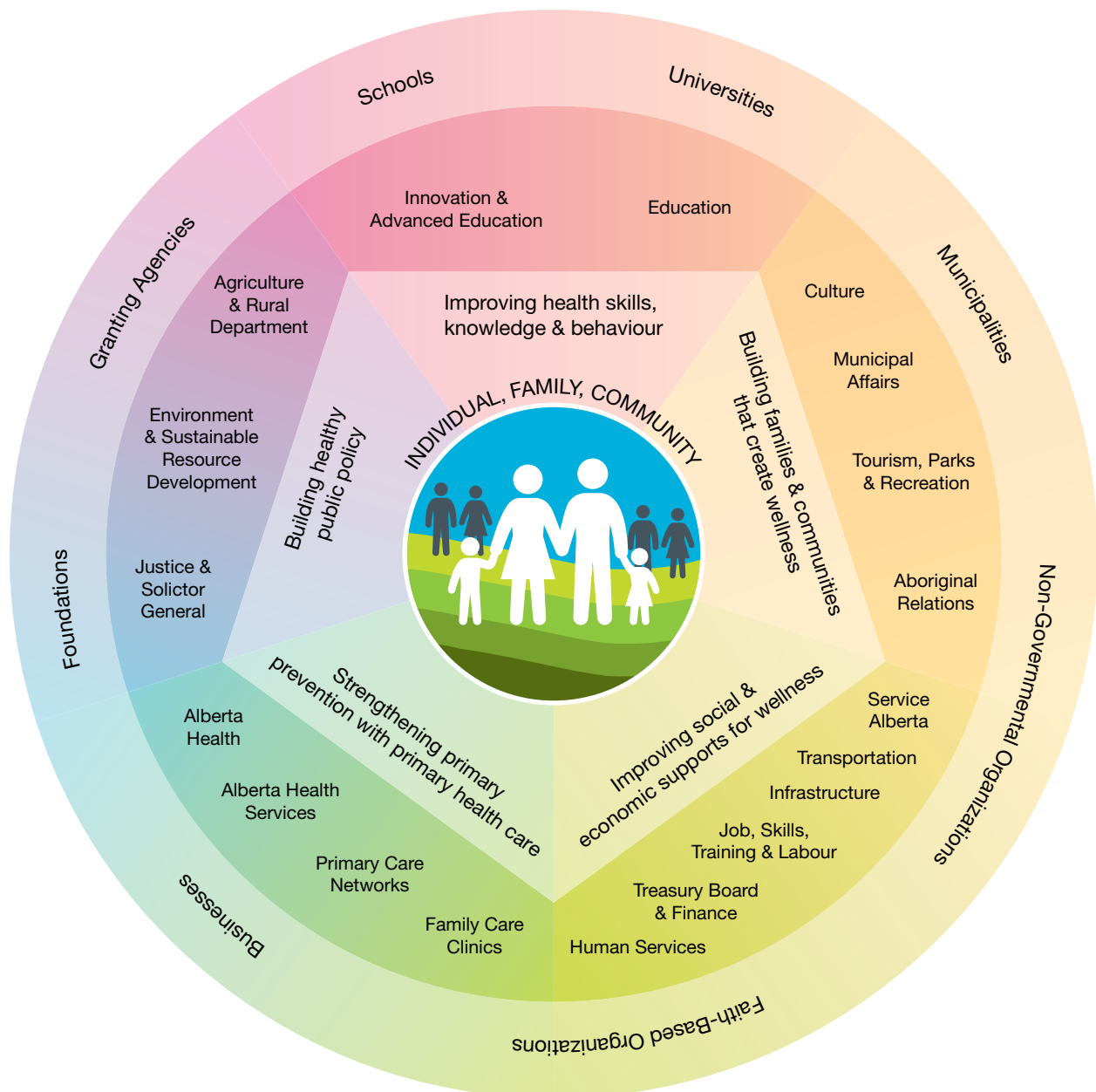
As we think about health more broadly, the responsibility for prevention and health promotion becomes shared more broadly – among individuals, community groups, health professionals, health service institutions and governments. Together we must work towards a health-care system that contributes to the pursuit of health, which means the role of the health sector must move increasingly in a health promotion direction, in addition to its responsibility for providing clinical and curative services.

Primary care is the first point of contact for Albertans with the health system – where the focus is to promote health and prevent illness. Alberta has worked hard to create a variety of models for primary care delivery that reflect the needs of individual communities and the needs of Albertans who live there. The contribution of primary care networks within the province is continuing to evolve, with practical approaches being explored that build on the positive attributes of what already exists. The introduction of Family Care Centres will add to this mix. Such an approach emphasizes services located in communities, and relevant to local needs.



## 5. Building Healthy Public Policy

Building healthy public policy for wellness means encouraging all sectors to act to maximize the potential health impact of their policies. The majority of the factors that improve health and wellness reside outside of the Ministry of Health. When it comes to factors as important and diverse as access to education, jobs, housing, motor vehicle safety, it is business leaders and employers, workplaces and schools, local governments and provincial ministries that have the greatest impact. Making health a priority of policy makers in all sectors can lead to better health by ensuring that we have laws that protect us, healthier public services, safe communities, a stable economy, and access to quality public education. Reaching across sectoral boundaries and working together means health and wellness become a common goal.



# Roles and Responsibilities

The success of *Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness* will require collaboration. This section outlines the roles that everyone – individuals, families, communities, non-governmental organizations, businesses and governments – has in contributing to outcomes related to health and wellness in Alberta.

**Individuals and families** make choices every day that have an impact on their health. Taking responsibility to protect our own health also means having access to information and opportunities to develop the life skills necessary to prevent disease, promote self-care, build healthy relationships, cope with challenges and make decisions. It is important to recognize that making healthy choices can be difficult for some individuals, when our communities do not support the choices we make. Creating healthy communities that support and empower individuals and families can enhance their capacity to make healthy lifestyle choices by providing opportunities and removing barriers.

**Communities** are at the heart of action on wellness. Healthy communities provide opportunities to access affordable housing, transportation, healthy and nutritious foods, education and employment, recreation, medical and social services, clean air and water and a safe and nurturing environment. Creating healthy communities ultimately makes it easier for individuals to make healthy choices and thrive in their communities. Building upon a community's strengths and supporting them in achieving their goals and dreams can lead to exciting possibilities. It creates a "bottom-up" approach that strengthens individuals and communities ability to be active partners in creating health and wellness in their communities, while having common goals and measures helps us all pull in the same direction.

**Non-government organizations** have a primary responsibility in supporting community capacity and mobilization and providing opportunities for participation and inclusion, often acting as a bridge between the government and the public. These groups have a role in the delivery of social services and supports that are responsive to local community needs.

**Academic institutions** have a role in conducting research where knowledge gaps are identified as well as in data collection, monitoring and evaluation to help determine the impact of health and wellness programs. They also have a critical role in the sharing of knowledge with communities and governments so that it can be used to inform policies, practice and programs. Building community capacity to adopt and apply new knowledge is also essential to the uptake of new knowledge.

**Businesses, industry and other private sector** partners create employment, training and learning opportunities for individuals that in turn contributes to the socioeconomic status and quality of life of Albertans. They also provide leadership as employers by supporting workplace health and wellness programs and by ensuring that their corporate practices protect Albertans from the harmful side-effects such as pollution and environmental damage that can impact health. Businesses and industry can also become champions for health by creating awareness and providing funding to communities to access resources.

**Government** at all levels – municipal, provincial and federal – have a vital role to play in bringing groups together around a common vision. They also have a role in creating policies, programs and legislation that create healthy communities and that support individuals in making healthy choices. Governments have a leadership role to play in supporting communities to address local needs and fostering a culture that promotes the vision, principles and outcomes of *Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness*.

The Government of Alberta has long recognized the importance of supporting its citizens to optimize their personal wellbeing and experience healthy communities. Through investments in early childhood development and mental health, Albertans will be better equipped to make healthier choices and improve their overall sense of individual and community wellness. Several other actions have also been taken by the Government of Alberta including the implementation of the *Tobacco Reduction Strategy, 2012-2022* and commitment to eliminate childhood poverty through the development of the *Poverty Reduction Strategy*.

Alberta is showing progress in several areas that have significant impacts on the wellness of individuals and communities. Through the implementation of *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*, almost 4,000 individuals experiencing homelessness from across Alberta were provided with permanent housing and supports. Government departments have also worked together to streamline processes and make it easier for individuals to access appropriate services. The *Traffic Safety Plan*, launched in 2007, was the first of its kind in Canada and was designed to reduce traffic-related deaths and injuries. As a result of several traffic safety efforts under the Plan, traffic fatalities in Alberta have declined for a fourth straight year and are at their lowest level since record keeping began in 1965.



## Moving Forward

Government cannot tackle this issue alone. We will collaborate and work with stakeholders on multiple levels in order to make a difference in the lives of Albertans. Some of these actions may be best placed within government policy, while others will have greater impact when community-led.

Individuals, families, non-government organizations, industry and all levels of government have a role to play in addressing the complexity of the conditions that underlie healthier communities and support people in adopting healthy behaviours to strengthen their wellbeing.

*Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness* provides a starting point for further discussion, for action and for change. It is intended to form the foundation upon which we can move forward together in creating *Health for All... Wellness for Life* in Alberta. It provides a compelling reason and rationale for focusing proactively on our health and the factors that impact it. It lays out a high level vision, principles and strategies for achieving wellness in Alberta.

We will start by releasing *Alberta's Strategic Approach to Wellness* to a diverse range of wellness stakeholders at the International Wellness Symposium in the fall 2013. This event will help to set the stage for the steps to come, as well as provide a key opportunity to transfer the most current, evidence-based knowledge and practice on wellness.



## Appendix: Factors that Affect our Health and Wellness

Factor	Description of Factor	Impact on Wellness
<b>Early Childhood Development</b>	Early childhood is generally referred to as the period in a child's life before the age of six when their bodies and brains grow rapidly. This includes the infant, toddler and preschool years. <sup>19</sup>	The early childhood period is considered to be the most important developmental phase throughout the lifespan. Early childhood development and experiences can have long lasting biological, psychological and social effects on wellness.
<b>Education and Learning</b>	Education and learning refers to knowledge, skills and competencies needed to participate effectively in society and in the economy. <sup>20</sup>	People with higher education live longer, participate more actively in politics and in the community where they live, commit fewer crimes and rely less on social assistance. <sup>21</sup>
<b>Employment and Working Conditions</b>	Employment refers to paid work. Working conditions refer to the conditions in which an individual works including but not limited to hours of work, commuting time, amenities, physical environment, stress, noise levels, and safety. <sup>22</sup>	Employment provides income to meet basic needs and to pursue personal interests. Having a job also helps people stay connected with society, build self-esteem, and develops skills and competencies. Societies with high levels of employment are also richer, more politically stable and healthier. <sup>23</sup> Working conditions affect an individual's physical health and safety, emotional and social wellbeing. <sup>24</sup>
<b>Food Security</b>	Food security refers to all people, at all times, having physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. <sup>25</sup>	Food security provides people with nutritional adequacy (sufficient amounts and quality of food), provides food choice, and promotes social eating. <sup>26</sup> How food is produced, processed, distributed and marketed, people's income and where they live affects their food choices. <sup>27</sup>

Factor	Description of Factor	Impact on Wellness
<b>Housing</b>	Acceptable housing is adequate in condition, suitable in size and affordable. <sup>28</sup>	Safe and comfortable places to live are fundamental to a sense of wellbeing. Housing is essential to meet basic needs, offers a place to sleep and rest where people feel safe, have privacy and personal space and can raise a family. <sup>29</sup>
<b>Built Environment</b>	The built environment includes homes, schools, workplaces, parks/recreation areas, business areas and roads. It extends overhead such as electric transmission lines, underground such as waste disposal sites and transit, and across the province such as highways. The built environment encompasses all buildings and spaces, the products they contain, and the infrastructure that link and support them. <sup>30</sup>	Well-built environments enhance physical activity, promote access to local foods, improve air and water quality, protect green spaces and parks, provide accessible housing, promote arts and culture, encourage safety, and lower injury rates. <sup>31</sup>
<b>Income</b>	Income refers to financial security and having adequate income to meet basic needs such as housing, food and clothing. It's also about being able to take advantage of opportunities and lead a rewarding life. <sup>32</sup>	The level of income affects personal and family wellbeing. Higher incomes provide access to more goods and services and offers a higher standard of living. <sup>33</sup>
<b>Safety and Security</b>	Safety and security refers to safety and protection from harm. It also involves individual and community perceptions of safety, which can be just as important to wellbeing as the experience of harm or threats of harm. <sup>34</sup>	Personal security is a core element for the wellbeing of individuals, and largely reflects the risks of people being physically assaulted or falling victim to other types of crime. Crime may lead to loss of life and property, as well as physical pain, post-traumatic stress and anxiety. The biggest impact of crime on people's wellbeing appears to be through the feeling of vulnerability that it causes. <sup>35</sup>

Factor	Description of Factor	Impact on Wellness
<b>Natural Environment</b>	The natural environment refers to living things in all their diversity: wildlife, rivers and streams, lakes and seas, urban green space and open countryside, forests and farmed land. It includes the fundamentals of human survival: food, fuel, air and water, together with the natural systems that cycle water, clean out pollutants, produce healthy soil, protect people from floods and regulate the climate. <sup>36</sup>	At certain levels of exposure, contaminants in our air, water, food and soil can cause a variety of adverse health effects, including cancer, birth defects, respiratory illness and gastrointestinal ailments. <sup>37</sup> Access and connection to the outdoors and wildlife increase physical activity, mental wellbeing and interactions with people. <sup>38</sup>
<b>Social Supports</b>	Social supports are the physical and emotional comforts given to people by their family, friends, co-workers and others. It also refers to people's social involvement and interaction with others. <sup>39</sup>	Social support plays an important role in mental health or substance use problems. For example, people who are clinically depressed report lower levels of social support than people who are not currently depressed. Specifically, people coping with depression tend to report fewer supportive friends, less contact with their friends, less satisfaction with their friends and relatives, lower marital satisfaction, and confide less in their partners. It is likely that lack of social support and feelings of loneliness can make us more vulnerable to the onset of mental health or substance use problems like depression. <sup>40</sup>



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