

*Health* is  
*everyone's*  
*business*

*A snapshot of some of  
Alberta's wellness initiatives*

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## Introduction

**Health is everyone's business.** Providing access to medical care has historically been an important part of the health system. If we want to take steps to improve the overall health of Albertans we have to take a hard look at the bigger picture, at factors beyond health care that contribute to health.

As we face a new millennium, it is increasingly obvious that government departments and sectors across the board must be involved in supporting health. Everything we do, from lifestyle choices to the environment we live and work in, has an impact on our health.

In the government of Alberta, *health is everyone's business*. This means continuing to improve linkages across departments and sectors. It starts with shared values and a focus on achieving concrete results. Once that happens, public policy targeted specifically at improving Albertans' overall health, from cradle to grave, will follow.

This booklet provides a snapshot of a few of Alberta's current key prevention, promotion and protection programs/initiatives. They are not only improving the health and wellness of Albertans today – but far into the future.

## Prenatal HIV Screening

### Issue

- Pregnant women who are HIV positive are at risk of passing the virus to their babies
- Antiviral drugs reduce the chances of passing on HIV to the fetus by at least 70%

### What are we doing about it?

- The province now has a **Prenatal HIV Screening Program**
- HIV blood tests are provided to all pregnant women (unless they decline)
- Since the program was instituted in 1998, 14 pregnant women have tested positive for HIV

### What can we expect?

- By starting an early intervention drug therapy, babies of HIV positive moms are less likely to get the virus
- The Prenatal HIV Screening Program costs \$250,000/year, whereas the lifetime costs for a single case of HIV is \$428,000

## Alberta Children's Initiative Partnership for FAS

### Issue

- Nearly 1/3 (29%) of all children in government care in Edmonton and Calgary have **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)**
- Thousands more may suffer from FAS within every community in Alberta
- At least 60% of the prison population suffer from the effects FAS
- An individual with FAS costs the taxpayer \$3 million over his/her life

### What are we doing about it?

- This year, the Alberta government is investing \$2.25 million in the Alberta Partnership for FAS, led by Children's Services and AADAC
- 3 Alberta government departments are participating in the partnership (Justice, Learning, and Health & Wellness)
- Together we're:
  - implementing clinical practice guidelines to improve the diagnosis and care of children born with FAS
  - developing resource material for FAS prevention for teachers (K to 9)
  - developing a training program in correctional institutions for the prevention of FAS, and care, support and treatment for those affected with FAS

### What can we expect?

- Through preventative efforts, it is expected that fewer babies will have FAS and that babies born with FAS will be provided with the best possible care and services

## Metabolic Screening

### Issue

- Every year, as many as 30 Alberta babies are born with one of three conditions that can lead to permanent brain damage
- If these conditions are detected within the first few days of life, they can be fully treated
- Last year, 1,000 out of 38,000 newborns in Alberta were not screened for these conditions

### What are we doing about it?

- In 1999, Alberta Health & Wellness launched an improved **Metabolic Screening Program**
- The improved program will track virtually every newborn in the province so children will get treatment as needed

### What can we expect?

- Alberta's new Metabolic Screening Program will help decrease the number of children who develop these diseases
- The program will save the province at least \$600,000 per year in medical costs

## Immunization

### Issue

- Immunization programs help prevent a number of diseases
- It's imperative that organized immunization programs continue in Alberta

### What are we doing about it?

- Since immunization programs were adopted in the 1950s, the number of deaths from diseases like whooping cough, polio, measles and Hib meningitis and diphtheria are near zero
- In 1998, there was only a single death from these diseases

### What can we expect?

- Continuing to immunize children in Alberta will decrease the chances of deaths resulting from these diseases
- Every dollar spent on immunizing our children saves \$30 dollars in direct health costs per child. In other words a 30 to 1 return in savings

## Food-Borne Illnesses Prevention

### Issue

- Food safety and the detection of food-borne illnesses are a vital part of health protection

### What are we doing about it?

- Through the [Canada Alberta Partners in Food Safety](#) initiative, Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development, Alberta Health and Wellness, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency are coordinating their respective responsibilities to create a more comprehensive food safety program

### What can we expect?

- Access to safer food, through more streamlined inspections

## Fort McMurray Oil Sands Monitoring

### Issue

- Nearby residents are concerned about exposure to contaminants in the air

### What are we doing about it?

- The \$1.5 million [Fort McMurray Oil Sands Monitoring Project](#) has been launched and co-sponsored by Syncrude, Suncor and Alberta Health & Wellness
- Exposure of individuals to indoor/outdoor air contaminants is monitored

### What can we expect?

- By monitoring the environment we can help to make our environment healthier

## Alberta Heart Health Project

### Issue

- Heart disease is the #1 killer of Albertans

### What are we doing about it?

- Health Canada and Alberta Health & Wellness funded a series of [Alberta Heart Health Projects](#)

### What can we expect?

- More and more Albertans are learning about the behaviours that can trigger heart disease
- One project involved 400 City of Edmonton employees who were offered health education classes
- One year later, absenteeism dropped from 5.3 days to 3.9 days

## Injury Prevention

### Issue

- Injuries are the leading cause of death for Albertans age 44 and younger
- 31,000 people are admitted to hospital every year with an injury
- It costs Albertans \$935 million/year to treat injuries

### What are we doing about it?

- Alberta Health & Wellness helped fund [The Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research \(ACICR\)](#)
- ACICR addresses the full injury continuum including: prevention, health care, rehabilitation and reintegration of the injured individual into society, and research

### What can we expect?

- In time, the number and severity of injuries in the province will decrease

## Farm Safety

### Issue

- Deaths related to farm injuries continue to be a problem in Alberta

### What are we doing about it?

- The [Farm Safety Program of Agriculture, Food & Rural Development](#) was formed in 1976
- The program tracks the number of farm injuries and fatalities in Alberta
- Farm safety awareness programs have been developed for Alberta farmers, their families and farm workers
- A farm safety-related program called '[Job Safety Skills for Young Workers](#)' has been introduced into the junior and high school curriculums in rural Alberta
- That school program has been recognized as the best curriculum of school-based farm safety training in the world

### What can we expect?

- The number and severity of farm injuries in Alberta will decrease



## Workplace Safety

### Issue

- 126,400 workers were injured on the job in 1998
- 10 workers between the ages of 15-24 died from their injuries
- The most common causes were over-exertion and being struck by an object

### What are we doing about it?

- **Alberta Human Resources and Employment** staff provide a wide range of services
- Services include: Conducting worksite inspections, education and training, establishing worksite committees, and investigating worksite incidents and fatalities

### What can we expect?

- A safer working environment

## Traffic Safety

### Issue

- Traffic safety is the combination of awareness, education, road standards and enforcement, working to sustain a safe road system
- In 1998, 429 people died and 24,935 were injured as a result of traffic collisions on Alberta roadways
- More than 89 percent of all traffic collisions are due to driver error

### What are we doing about it?

- Formed in 1996, **Alberta Infrastructure's Traffic Safety Initiative (TSI)** coordinates and delivers results-oriented traffic programs
  - It focuses on motorists, commercial vehicles, snowmobiles, motorcycles, impaired driving, child safety and many other issues
  - TSI partners with a number of stakeholders to achieve its mandate
- To address childhood injuries caused by the misuse of child seats and seat belts, in 1997, a multi-stakeholder group launched the **Think...Think...Again Child Passenger Restraint Program**. Over 2,000 child passenger restraint violation tickets have been written. Of the ticketed drivers, 22% opted to attend an educational session instead of paying the ticket

### What can we expect?

- The long-term goal is to produce a sustained reduction in the number and severity of traffic collisions in Alberta

## Tobacco Reduction Initiatives

### Issue

- Every year smoking kills an estimated 3,200 Albertans
- Tobacco-related health issues costs the Alberta economy \$729 million every year
- 29% of Albertans over 15 are still smoking

### What are we doing about it?

- In 1998, government launched the [Alberta Tobacco Reduction Alliance \(ATRA\)](#)
- Nearly \$1 million dollars will be invested into ATRA in 1999
- ATRA has 58 member organizations, including all 17 Regional Health Authorities and a range of government and private sector partners

### What can we expect?

- ATRA is working towards four outcomes:
  - a tobacco-free youth
  - clean indoor air to breathe
  - healthy workplaces
  - support for smokers who want to quit

## Action for Health

### Issue

- The delivery of health promotion and illness and injury prevention programming across the province needed to be strengthened

### What are we doing about it?

- In the last few years, the government provided \$4.5 million annually in grants to the Regional Health Authorities (RHAs)
- Regional initiatives supported through the grants include: community kitchens, smoking cessation classes, and support programs for teens highlighting risk behaviours

### What can we expect?

- Facilitated by the RHAs, there will be more direct cross-sectoral community involvement in the planning and delivery of health promotion, and illness and injury prevention programming across the province

## Substance Abuse and Problem Gambling

### Issue

- Addiction impacts broadly across society, affecting health, family and personal relationships, workplace productivity, and community safety.
- At some point in their lives, many Albertans will experience problems related to their alcohol, other drug use or gambling, and many more will face difficulties because of someone else's addiction
- The estimated social and economic costs of alcohol and other drug use in Alberta are \$1.6 billion or \$613 per person

### What are we doing about it?

- The **Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC)** is the agency of the Government of Alberta with responsibility to prevent and treat substance abuse and problem gambling
- All Albertans have access to a continuum of AADAC services, including: crisis intervention, detoxification, residential treatment, outpatient counselling, community prevention/education, addiction information and print materials, and training resources
- AADAC works with people, building on their existing strengths and resources, and helping them develop the skills they need to avoid reliance on alcohol, other drugs or gambling

### What can we expect?

- Improved population health. The prevention and treatment of addiction reduces illness, injury and premature death, and improves individual and social functioning
- Cost savings. AADAC programs and services provide a lower cost alternative to hospital and medical care. Successful addiction treatment also reduces the economic costs associated with crime and other social problems
- AADAC will continue to demonstrate innovation in program planning, working closely with other service providers in communities throughout Alberta, and contributing knowledge and expertise to initiatives across Government



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