

The Chief Public Health Officer's report on the state of public health in Canada 2008 ^[1]

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Source: Public Health Agency of Canada

Format: Report

Publication Date: 1 Aug 2008

AVAILABILITY

- Full report in pdf ^[2]

- Chapter 4: Social and economic factors that influence our health and contribute to health inequalities ^[3]

This report is the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada's first annual report to Canadians on the state of public health in Canada. It explores the public health approach, the health of the Canadian population, variances in health status among the population and factors that contribute to health inequalities. Efforts to reduce these inequalities can be found across the country and at many levels. They include successful interventions that &em; through better understanding, collaboration and collective action &em; may serve to reduce Canada's health inequalities and improve quality of life for all Canadians.

Excerpts from report:

In general, health status follows a gradient where people in less advantageous socio-economic circumstances are not as healthy as those at each subsequently higher socio-economic level. In other words, those with the lowest incomes and education, inadequate housing, poor working conditions, detrimental health behaviours, limited access to health care and who lack early childhood support and/or social supports are more likely to develop poorer physical and mental health outcomes than those living in better circumstances. This is true for each level (or rise) along the gradient. However, improvement to one or more of these factors can result in an improvement in overall health. Many programs and services targeted at reducing social and health inequalities through improvements to, or by mitigating, socio-economic factors have been undertaken in Canada at all levels. Successful, promising and/or unique responses are profiled for each factor.

Despite these efforts, however, certain trends continue to raise concerns. For example, the gap between those with the highest and lowest incomes in Canada continues to grow and poverty rates for some children, Aboriginal Peoples, recent immigrants and persons with disabilities are significantly higher than for the general population. As well, Canada's child poverty rate is higher than many similarly developed countries. Food security is also a critical issue, with the prevalence of school food programs and food banks on the rise. Inadequate housing and homelessness continue to plague Aboriginal Peoples, immigrants, low-income earners and marginalized youth; while urban sprawl and other environmental conditions are a growing concern for many.

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Since 1997, Quebec's steady decline in poverty rates has resulted in the greatest overall decrease among provinces resulting in a 2005 child poverty rate lower than the national average. While much of this decline is due to economic growth, government policies are also believed to have contributed to lower poverty rates. Quebec's Family Policy was put in place in 1997. It includes an integrated child allowance, enhanced maternity and parental leave, extended benefits for self-employed women, and subsidized early childhood education and child care services. Through this policy, the province has been able to establish a network of child care centres for children aged four years and younger from existing non-profit daycare centres and home agencies. The centres offer low-cost care and are no cost for parents on social assistance. Elementary schools in the public system also provide low-cost before- and after-school care and full-day kindergarten is provided to all five-year-olds. In addition, some school boards offer full-day kindergarten to four-year-olds from low-income families.

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The subsection on Early Childhood Development can be found in Chapter 4 on page 46 of the full report.

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