

Community Dispatch

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CANADA VOTES 2004 – POPULATION HEALTH

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ISSUE 5: POPULATION HEALTH

In recent years, a growing body of evidence has developed to support the idea that health is determined by a complex interaction of social factors. These social issues must be addressed if we are to continue to build healthy individuals and communities.

The Population Health approach suggests that broad determinants of health are linked to the health of our communities. These social determinants of health include early childhood development, education, employment and working conditions, food security, health services, housing, income and income distribution, social inclusion, the social safety net, and unemployment and job security.

Many of our current health debates revolve around acute care issues including the important issues of health services, Medicare, and the Canada Health Act. *The Population Health* approach suggests that we widen our policy discussions to include consideration of the issues that occur upstream of health crises. By using this perspective we are challenged to look beyond the budget cycle, the election cycle and the business cycle to develop policy solutions that improve health and well being across the life cycle.

For example, we know that poverty is directly connected to health outcomes. A recent report by the Canadian Population Health Initiative (CPHI) concludes that inequality in disposable incomes is increasing across Canada. "People with more wealth (more assets) also have more resources when faced with job loss, long-term disability, family breakdown or other crises."

Additionally, we know that early childhood development also has profound implications across the life span. The CPHI report found that "a poor start not only threatens or delays development, but also may result in a chain of poor outcomes in the future."

Within this context, we are challenged to understand that there are intricate connections between the current policy issues and debates. The health of our communities can be supported by developing solutions that address issues from the broadest perspective possible.

Issues:

- Health outcomes are intrinsically linked with a variety of policy issues including poverty, homelessness, early development, gender, employment and education.
- While our health care system (including Medicare and the basic principles of the Canada Health Act) must be maintained and strengthened, we must work to ensure that resources are allocated to address issues linked to long term health outcomes.

Questions for Candidates:

- How will you utilize the Population Health approach to support the building of healthy and inclusive communities in Canada?
- How will you address the growing disparity of income and opportunity in Canada?
- How will you promote policies and programs to provide support for low income people to create independence through job skills and community economic development?

To find out more:

- Population Health Resources (Health Canada):
www.population-health.com
- Improving the Health of Canadians (Canadian Population Health Initiative):
www.cihi.ca/ihc2004

- Social Determinants of Health across the Life Span (York University):
www.socialjustice.org/subsites/conference/program.htm
- Closing The Distance – Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative (SEII):
www.closingthedistance.ca



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