
Status Report

Enhancing the Canadian Best Practices Portal

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“Minimally, the practice of evidence-based public health requires that the right people have the right information at the right time and in the right formats.”^{1,p. 12}

The mission of the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is “to promote and protect the health of Canadians through leadership, partnership, innovation and action in public health.”² To contribute to this Mission, PHAC has put in place a number of knowledge mobilization initiatives to support evidence-based decision-making in public health settings. One of these, launched in 2006, is the Canadian Best Practices Portal,^{3,4} a searchable database that provides details of effective community-level interventions to promote health and prevent chronic diseases: <http://cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca/>.

The development of the Portal was part of a larger federal initiative, which included the creation of PHAC itself, to strengthen public health capacity in Canada in response to experiences with SARS and the recommendations of the *National Advisory Committee on SARS and Public Health*.⁵ More specifically, the need for a high quality database summarizing current evidence on the effectiveness of population and public health interventions was identified in an earlier report, *Charting the Course: A Pan-Canadian Consultation on Population and Public Health Priorities*.⁶

Other initiatives were also introduced around this time to strengthen public health capacity. In 2005, six National Collaborating Centres for Public Health were established and funded through PHAC. These Centres “produce information to help public health professionals improve their response to public health threats, chronic disease and injury, infec-

tious diseases and health disparities.”⁷ They focus on translating evidence produced by academics and researchers so that it can be used by public health practitioners.⁷

Another excellent source of evidence-based information for public health practitioners is Health-Evidence.ca, a website that provides access to “methodologically-sound reviews of health promotion and public health interventions.”⁸ The ultimate goal of this project is “to facilitate adoption and implementation of effective policies/programs/interventions at the local and regional public health decision making levels across Canada.”⁸

Provincial, territorial and municipal governments as well as local health units across Canada have also put in place initiatives to strengthen public health capacity. For example, British Columbia developed a *Framework for Core Functions in Public Health*⁹ to guide the province’s public health programs, while Ontario established public health standards “to establish requirements for fundamental public health programs and services.”^{10,p1} Quebec has also been active in several areas, including the publication of the *Québec Public Health Program 2003-2012*, which “specifies the public health services that are accessible to all Québec citizens.”^{11,p1} In 2010, Nova Scotia produced *Moving Forward: A Commitment to Public Health’s Future*,¹² building on the earlier report *The Renewal of Public Health in Nova Scotia: Building a Public Health System to Meet the Needs of Nova Scotians*.¹³ Other provinces and territories have responded in a range of different

ways to increase their public health capacity post-SARS.

Despite the resources available to public health practitioners, ongoing assessments of the Canadian Best Practices Portal indicated that access to a comprehensive listing of information to support planning, implementation and evaluation of public health programs was still a concern. Given this expressed need, PHAC staff began to plan the content for the enhanced Portal, while retaining its original focus on health promotion and chronic disease prevention.

To support identification of additional content, PHAC conducted a review of provincial and, where available, territorial public health legislation and standards. The purpose of this analysis was to identify which areas of health promotion and chronic disease prevention most public health departments across Canada were mandated to address. Not surprisingly, these areas included tobacco control, promotion of physical activity and healthy eating, as well as integrated approaches to chronic disease prevention. Once these topics were identified, relevant information was selected to support program development in each area. This information was found on government websites at the provincial, territorial, federal and international level.

For health promotion programs, and those which address modifiable risk factors, information provided in the “Public Health Topics” section of the enhanced Portal includes surveillance data, strategies, guidance on what works (such as

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guidelines, recommendations and policy approaches) as well as links to relevant systematic reviews of the literature from Health-Evidence.ca and to “Best Practice Interventions” on the Portal itself.

The “Chronic Diseases” section of the enhanced Portal focuses on the prevention of specific chronic diseases. In this section, a broader array of information is provided on risk factors, surveillance, prevention strategies and guidelines, as well as links to key publications, provincial/territorial disease prevention sites, tools and resources, funded projects and relevant systematic reviews of the literature from Health-Evidence.ca.

The “Best Practice Interventions” section provides a link to the searchable database on effective community-level interventions from the original Canadian Best Practices Portal. The revised “Resources” section provides an annotated listing of respected Canadian resources for evidence-informed decision making and planning public health programs.

Health departments are often asked to comment on or develop public health policy for their jurisdictions. The section of the enhanced Portal on policy issues brings together key documents in Canadian and international public health policy, as well as providing links to policy resources and instruments. Finally, the “Learn More” section provides a comprehensive listing of RSS feeds, email updates and listserves from public health agencies and organizations.

Future plans for the enhanced Portal include expanding the range of public health topics and adding other sets of resources to support public health programming, as well as an exploration of local health agency websites. The Canadian Best Practices Portal is an evolving resource and plans are to update it twice a year. If you have any comments or suggestions on content or approach, please contact us at: <http://cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca/contact-us/>

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