

Research About – Population Health

CIHR

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Through CIHR, the Government of Canada invested approximately **\$67.8 million** in 2007-08 in population health-related research across Canada.



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The Facts

Many factors influence health. Income and social status, education and literacy, employment, working conditions, social support networks, and social and physical environments are all important determinants of health at the population level. Here are some examples:

- Men living in Canada's richest neighbourhoods can expect to live 79 years, five years longer than men in Canada's poorest neighbourhoods.
- Canadians' perceptions of their own health and well-being change depending on education level. Only 50% of persons with a Grade 8 education or less self-rated their physical health as excellent or very good compared to over 70% among persons with a bachelor's degree.
- Rates of sexually transmitted infections are increasing sharply. Between 1997 and 2006, reported chlamydia rates increased 78%, gonorrhoea rates increased 122% and infectious syphilis rates increased 1,050%.
- People who earn more are more likely to engage in physical activity in their leisure time than lower-income earners, according to analysis of data collected in the 2005 Canadian Community Health Survey.

(Source: Statistics Canada, Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2008)



Finding Solutions

The downside of the energy boom

Western Canada's energy boom is producing more than instant wealth. Rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are also booming. The incidence of chlamydia in Northeastern British Columbia exceeds the provincial average by 32% - largely among the young men who have moved there to work in the oil and gas industry. Researchers from the University of British Columbia's Department of Health Care and Epidemiology interviewed 25 young people to find out how boomtown life affects sexual behaviour. CIHR-sponsored researchers Drs. Jean Shoveller, Aleck Ostry and Mieke Koehoorn found that people living in "rapidly urbanizing remote locales" need more STI prevention and testing services, along with outreach programs and condom distribution for oil and gas workers.

Food for thought for kids

A simple, easy-to-use children's nutrition test is catching on. The Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preschooler (NutriSTEP™) has been adopted by the Ontario Public Health Association's Nutrition Resource Centre. Developed by CIHR-funded researchers Drs. Janis Randall Simpson and Heather Keller at the University of Guelph, NutriSTEP™ consists of a five-minute questionnaire that parents, caregivers or community professionals can use to identify three- to five-year-olds who need help to improve their diet. The Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion is monitoring the program.

Something in the water?

High levels of the element manganese in the water supply may be contributing to hyperactivity in children. In a CIHR-funded pilot study, Dr. Maryse Bouchard at the Université du Québec à Montréal compared the behaviours of children whose home water supply contained high and low levels of manganese. Dr. Bouchard and her colleagues found that children exposed to high levels of manganese were more likely to show hyperactive behaviours than children exposed to low levels of manganese. Based on these findings, the researchers have suggested that further studies are needed on the risks associated with manganese in the water supply.

The Researchers

Dr. Jim Dunn – Homes and Health

A Toronto newspaper headline reads: "Another attempt at heaven". Will the much touted redevelopment of Regent Park, Canada's largest public housing project, solve 60 years of problems? One thing's for certain: when it comes to the effects on tenants' overall health, Dr. Jim Dunn will be the first to see the big picture.

The CIHR-supported researcher is leading a ground-breaking study analyzing the health impacts of the redevelopment. The 12-year long redevelopment involves the demolition of existing buildings and construction of a new mixed residential-commercial district with a split of roughly 40 per cent public housing and the remainder available at market value.

"What's happening at Regent Park is really a natural experiment, and as a researcher I've got a front seat," says Dr. Dunn, who holds a Chair in Applied Public Health at the University of Toronto. "We're going to be able to look at the health impacts and we're working with partners who are deeply interested in these research results so they can incorporate them into policy."

Dr. Dunn is a geographer; his research examines the health impacts of efforts to improve neighbourhoods. "The physical and psychological benefits of having a safe home are huge," says Dr. Dunn.



The big public policy question, he says, is the extent to which we can improve individuals' health by improving housing and neighbourhoods. Accordingly, he's leading pioneering Canadian studies to collect evidence about the link between housing and health.

Dr. Dunn's group will collect baseline data from the public housing tenants before they move into the first new units starting in 2009, and conduct follow-up interviews with residents after they've been in their new homes for a year.

The results will be shared widely in the community and with scholars and decision-makers in Canada and internationally.



For more information, go to
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