

Overview: Wellness Foundation Policy Recommendations

Wellness Alberta is very concerned about the chronic disease epidemic in Alberta. Chronic disease is the leading cause of death and disability in Alberta and it has a major impact on the physical, mental and economic health of all residents. The good news is that over 40% of these diseases can be prevented by taking action to reduce risk factors including tobacco and alcohol use, poor nutrition and physical inactivity.

Wellness Alberta Recommends:

- Establish a Wellness Foundation to transform the health and quality of life of all Albertans.
- The Wellness Foundation must be **well-financed, sustainable and operate independent** of the health care system.
- The Wellness Foundation must **focus on primary prevention** to address major **modifiable risk factors** for chronic disease.

Protecting mental health by preventing adverse childhood experiences and reducing risk for injury and disability is also crucial to preventing chronic disease. Unfortunately, the Alberta Government is spending more than ever before on acute health care, with the majority (over 90%) spent on treating and managing preventable disease and disability.

Wellness Alberta believes Alberta needs to make new, long-term and sustainable investments in preventing disease and promoting health to reduce the burden on our health care system and improve our quality of life. Alberta needs a Wellness Foundation.

To maximize the impact on the physical, mental and economic health of Albertans, the Wellness Foundation must be **well-financed, sustainable and independent** of the health care system. The Foundation will **focus on primary prevention** initiatives to **address six major modifiable risk factors** including physical inactivity, unhealthy eating, tobacco use, alcohol misuse, adverse childhood experiences and injury.

- We recommend that the Foundation be announced in 2015 and initiate operation in 2016.
- We propose the Foundation be initially financed through an annual grant of approximately \$60M, increasing to at least \$200M annually (representing an amount equivalent to at least 1% of the Alberta Health budget) over a 3-5 year period.
- The Foundation funding must be new investments that are in addition to Government's current overall investment in prevention and health promotion and must not be reallocated out of existing health budgets.
- New investments can be derived from the Alberta Government's general revenue fund or by the creation of a "Wellness Levy" funded by modest mark-ups on alcohol and tobacco products.
- Stable, long-term funding dedicated to prevention and health promotion is a good value for money: a one dollar investment can be expected to result in a minimum \$4-5 cost savings in future acute health care expenditures. However, some large scale interventions have been shown to produce a return-of-investment of up to 50:1.
- The Foundation will ensure new investments are directed to evidence-based strategies and sustained over the long-term to improve the health of Albertans and reduce the burden of chronic disease and disability on our health care system.
- The Foundation must function independently of the acute health care system to maintain financial autonomy, accountability and transparency.
- The Foundation should be created by an Act of the Legislative Assembly and report directly to the Assembly each year.
- The Foundation should be governed by an independent board comprised of key stakeholders that are selected by an all-party committee of the Legislative Assembly.

For more information about what a *Wellness Foundation* could do to promote and protect the wellness of children, adults, families and communities in Alberta, please see our website www.wellnessalberta.ca.