



## *Backgrounder: Toward a Healthy Future*

Similar to its 1996 predecessor (*Report on the Health of Canadians*), *Toward a Healthy Future: Second Report on the Health of Canadians* summarizes the most current information we have on the health of Canadians. It was released jointly by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Health in September 1999.

*Toward a Healthy Future* is a landmark public policy report that examines all of the major factors or “determinants” that influence the health of Canadians of all ages. It draws on results from the National Population Health Survey, the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth and numerous other sources, to provide a comprehensive picture of the state of the nation’s health. A complementary document, the *Statistical Report on the Health of Canadians (1999)*, which provides detailed statistics on over 80 topics, served as the main data source for the policy report.

Both reports were developed by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health in collaboration with Health Canada, Statistics Canada, the Canadian Institute for Health Information and a project team from the Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto.

### ***Contents of the Report***

*Toward a Healthy Future* takes a population health approach in its organization and analysis. The goals of a population health approach are to maintain and improve the health of the entire population, and to decrease inequities in health status among various population groups. This approach focuses on the interrelated conditions or determinants that most influence health, and applies the evidence to suggest broad priority areas for action.

The *Report* makes a special effort to look at the effects of socioeconomic status and gender on health and provides detailed information on the following topics:

- ◆ **Health status:** an overview of physical and psychosocial health, life expectancy, major causes of death and disabilities, and how Canada compares to other countries on selected health measures.
- ◆ **Socioeconomic environment:** an exploration of current trends in income, education and literacy, employment and unemployment, working conditions, social support, violence and civic participation, and their effect on health.
- ◆ **Healthy child and youth development:** a summary of key health and developmental issues in each of the stages of growing up.
- ◆ **Physical environment:** an exploration of the links between health and selected factors in the natural environment (such as air, climate and sun exposure) and the built environment (such as environmental tobacco smoke and housing).

- ◆ **Personal health practices:** a summary of key trends related to physical activity, healthy eating, body weight, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, injury prevention practices, gambling, sexual health practices, HIV testing and multiple risk taking among young people.
- ◆ **Health services:** a review of national expenditure patterns, Canadians' access to and use of health services, unmet health-care needs and alternative health services.
- ◆ **Biology and genetic endowment:** an introduction to some key issues, including new reproductive and genetic technologies, brain development and the biology of aging.

Each chapter contains highlights of the findings and a discussion of the implications of the findings for policy, practice and research. The final chapter suggests a vision for the future and three broad priorities for action. An executive summary provides an overview of the major findings, and a detailed appendix provides data on individual provinces and territories.

### ***An Essential Resource Document***

We can give no greater gift to the next generation than a healthy tomorrow. *Toward a Healthy Future* is an essential resource document for policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and members of the public who want to understand and address the challenges to health that we face today, and will face in the new millennium.

### ***How to Obtain the Reports***

You will find the full text of the public policy report, *Toward a Healthy Future: Second Report on the Health of Canadians*, on the Health Canada Web site: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>. The *Statistical Report on the Health of Canadians (1999)* is also available on the Health Canada site, as well as the Statistics Canada Web site: <http://www.statcan.ca> and the Web site of the Canadian Institute for Health Information: <http://www.cihi.ca>. Printed copies of both *Reports* are available from Provincial and Territorial Ministries of Health or from:

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Health Canada  
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Telephone: (613) 954-5995  
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