

**Building the Relationship Between
National Voluntary Organizations
Working in Health
and Health Canada**

A Framework for Action

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**Prepared by:
The Joint Working Group on the Voluntary Sector**

**For:
The Deputy Minister
Health Canada**



**Health Canada
Santé Canada**

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PREFACE

A common understanding of the voluntary sector and a shared language are essential for refining and implementing this action framework. Agreed upon definitions do not yet exist, however initiatives are underway to gain consensus on terms and to develop a description and typology of the Voluntary Health Sector.

The following “working” definitions and descriptions were developed to provide context and enhance understanding of this framework. They make it possible for Health Canada and national voluntary organizations working in health (NVOWH)* to move forward on implementing this “Framework for Action” in the short-term.

Working Definitions and Descriptions

1. National Voluntary Organizations Working in Health (NVOWH)*

Includes organizations that:

- ? have the health of the people of Canada as a primary focus
- ? are volunteer in nature and structure, with volunteer participation in governance, and/or program and service delivery
- ? provide a national perspective and undertake activities which are primarily national in scope

Professional associations, which primarily serve and represent their members, are considered outside this framework.

*NVOWH: Does not allude to an entity - this acronym is used to refer to national voluntary organizations working in health.

2. Health

“Health” is used in its broadest sense. Health is:

- ? concerned with the quality of life of the general population, of sub-populations and of individuals
- ? holistic, addressing overall health of individuals including social, mental, emotional and physical health
- ? related to the capacity of individuals to influence their own health, the health of others and the health of their communities
- ? influenced by a broad range of factors and the interactions among these factors including: biology and genetic endowment, personal health practices and coping skills, social and physical environments, income and social status, employment and working conditions, education, social support networks, early child development, gender, culture and health services
- ? about health promotion, prevention, protection and quality health care.

3. Health System

The term “health system” encompasses services delivered by the voluntary sector and the range of services, programs, supports and resources that contribute to the health of the people of Canada.

The “health care system”, is an interlocking set of ten provincial and two territorial health insurance plans.

4. Voluntary Sector

- ? consists of individuals and organizations whose activities are carried out primarily but not exclusively, by volunteers
- ? has as its essential attribute the willingness of people to donate their time, knowledge, skills, energy and resources to assist fellow citizens
- ? is involved in activities designed to provide help to individuals, families, groups and communities; these “helping” activities include: direct service, information exchange, public awareness, education, support, fundraising, advocacy, research, public dialogue and policy development.

5. Voluntary Organizations

- ? help to organize voluntary action and volunteers to: further a shared public interest or objective; provide services, supports and resources; and, engage in dialogue and action
- ? do not seek profit as an end in itself
- ? are accountable to constituencies or members through democratic governing structures and, sometimes, legal frameworks
- ? encompass national, provincial, territorial, regional, local, grassroots and citizens' organizations
- ? may have a financial relationship for which they are accountable, with governments, foundations, the private sector and citizens, but are autonomous and independent.

This “Framework for Action” provides a starting point for a renewed relationship between national voluntary organizations working in health (NVOWH)* and Health Canada.

The framework focuses on voluntary organizations working at the national level. It is recognized that Health Canada has equally important and valuable relationships with voluntary sector organizations at the regional, provincial, territorial and local levels.

This framework may be used as a building block for a broader policy framework on Voluntary Health Sector and Health Canada relationships at all levels and a model for other federal departments, levels of government and voluntary sector organizations.

National Voluntary Organizations Working in Health

NVOWH* are diverse in size, scope, origins, and focus. They share a tremendous capacity to mobilize volunteers. They contribute millions of volunteer hours annually to benefit the health of the people of Canada.

NVOWH* contribute to health and focus efforts in a variety of ways by identifying emerging issues. They are active in a broad range of issues such as:

- | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| ? | Aboriginal People | ? | International Health |
| ? | Adolescents | ? | Multiculturalism |
| ? | Children | ? | Older Persons |
| ? | Consumers | ? | Research and Policy |
| ? | Disabilities | ? | Safety and Injury Prevention |
| ? | Environment | ? | Social Development |
| ? | Fitness and Active Living | ? | Women |
| ? | Families | | |
| ? | Health Protection | | |
| ? | Human Rights | | |
| ? | Illness, Disease / Chronic Disease | | |

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Health Canada

Responsibility for health is shared by all of us, by citizens, community and voluntary groups, governments at all levels, labour and the private sector. Health services fall under several jurisdictions and sectors. Collaboration on health and strong working relationships are fundamental to achieving a better quality of life for the people of Canada.

Within the Federal Government, Health Canada is the Department with general responsibility for the health and safety of the people of Canada. Health Canada works with other federal departments, other levels of government, non-profit and voluntary organizations, the private sector and citizens to achieve the Department's mission *to help the people of Canada maintain and improve their health.*

2. PURPOSE

The **purpose** of this “Framework for Action” is:

- ? to build effective and long-term relationships between national voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada in order to benefit the health of the people of Canada.

The framework sets out:

- ? a common goal for the relationship
- ? shared principles
- ? areas of investment
- ? immediate actions for moving forward.

It provides **explicit recognition**:

- ? of the interdependence of Health Canada and national voluntary organizations working in health in helping the people of Canada improve their own health, the health of others and the health of their communities
- ? of the importance of a national voice and participation in health by citizens and communities
- ? that greater participation by national voluntary organizations working in health in health policy will create better policy, better programs and better health for the people of Canada
- ? of the value of collaboration on projects that improve health and the health system

- ? of the need to build the organizational and financial capacity of national voluntary organizations working in health to enable the sector to collaborate on health policy and programs
- ? of the importance of a collective commitment and a framework to build the relationship.

3. A COMMON GOAL

Help the people of Canada to improve their own health, the health of others and the health of their communities.

4. SHARED PRINCIPLES

The following five principles provide a basis for a new relationship between national voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada:

- cooperation to benefit the health of the people of Canada
- recognition of diverse needs, interests and capacity
- respect
- transparency
- accountability.

4.1 Cooperation to Benefit the Health of the People of Canada

Keeping sight of how the relationship benefits the health of the people of Canada is foremost.

National voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada seek to improve the health of the people of Canada by:

- ? providing opportunities for individuals and communities to help shape the health agenda and to become involved in health policy and emerging health issues
- ? enhancing opportunities to volunteer and to participate in programs, services and activities that directly contribute to health

- ? increasing effectiveness and responsiveness of the health system to the needs of citizens and communities of Canada
- ? supporting access to a comprehensive range of health programs, services and supports
- ? increasing the quality and accessibility of information on health and risks to health
- ? mobilizing resources for health.

4.2 Recognition of Diverse Needs, Interests and Capacities

It is recognized that there are diverse needs, interests and capacities within and between national voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada and that:

- ? national voluntary organizations working in health are highly diverse, differing significantly in size, scope, structure, origins and focus
- ? collective action can be a challenge
- ? mandates, policies, priorities, resources, issues of confidentiality and governance may limit capacity for collaboration and partnerships in both sectors
- ? both Health Canada and national voluntary organizations working in health bring a range of resources to the relationship including, expertise, financial and human resources, material resources, infrastructure and information
- ? the costs to national voluntary organizations working in health of maintaining a national voice, a national infrastructure and volunteer participation in governance and activities are significant
- ? Health Canada recognizes a need to link with the people of Canada, and that the voluntary sector provides an important vehicle for making this link
- ? financial and organizational stability are essential qualities for effective collaboration
- ? although national voluntary organizations working in health have a tremendous capacity to mobilize volunteer and financial resources to benefit health, many have difficulty sustaining a national infrastructure.

4.3 Respect

Respect is jointly recognized by national voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada as the basis for an evolving and long-term relationship.

This includes respect for:

- ? past and present contributions of both the national voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada to the health of the people of Canada and to the relationship
- ? the way in which each sector adds value to the other and can accomplish more for the people of Canada by working together
- ? differences in values and beliefs
- ? equality in the partnership
- ? inclusiveness to ensure fair and balanced representation of NVOWH* needs and constituent interests
- ? the value of participation of citizens, communities, other non-profit organizations, levels of government, and the private sector in health.

4.4 Transparency

Carrying out one’s activities in a way that is easily understood helps to build trust in the relationship. National voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada commit to achieving transparency and trust through:

- ? open, honest and regular communication
- ? shared language and agreed upon working definitions
- ? willingness to share information and improve access to information
- ? shared understanding of respective mandates, roles and responsibilities
- ? easily understood policy, decision-making, operational and administrative processes.

4.5 Accountability

*NVOWH: Does not allude to an entity - this acronym is used to refer to national voluntary organizations working in health.

Health Canada and national voluntary organizations working in health recognize and take responsibility for the following accountabilities:

Accountability to the public-at-large

- ? ensuring that public funds are being well spent
- ? for making a commitment to results.

Accountability to respective constituencies

- ? accountability of Health Canada to the Minister, Cabinet, Parliament and the people of Canada
- ? accountability of national voluntary organizations working in health to their governance structures, their members and the people they serve.

Mutual accountability

- ? for maintaining the relationship
- ? implementing, monitoring and refining this framework.

5. MOVING FROM PRINCIPLES TO ACTION

The common goal and shared principles in this framework provide a basis for building a solid long-term relationship. The framework needs to move from the goal and principles to concrete relationship-building on four fronts:

- ? Health policy
- ? Joint Action Plan on Common Priorities (National Projects)
- ? Capacity of national voluntary organizations working in health
- ? A collective commitment

5.1 Health Policy

Health Canada and national voluntary organizations working in health recognize that greater participation by NVOWH* in health policy will create better policy, better programs and better health for the people of Canada.

National voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada agree:

- ? **to increase individual and collective participation by national voluntary organizations working in health in policy development, implementation and evaluation**

- ? **to enhance participation in each aspect of the policy development process:**
 - > identification and definition of policy issues
 - > refinement of policy priorities
 - > development of policy options
 - > contributing policy expertise and research
 - > strengthening links to the research community
 - > monitoring and reporting on the impact of policies
 - > policy evaluation and dissemination
 - > review of existing policies.

ACTION:

1. *Develop a joint action plan for enhancing participation of national voluntary organizations working in health in Health Canada's policy processes. This action plan will include concrete and immediate measures for short-term, mid-term and long-term outcomes.*

5.2 Joint Action Plan on Common Priorities (National Projects)

National voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada recognize the value and benefit of collaboration on projects on mutual priorities and agree:

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- ? **to improve methods and mechanisms for identifying common priorities (bilateral and multi-lateral)**

- ? **to increase collaboration (bilateral and multi-lateral) on projects that contribute to the health of the people of Canada and Canada's health system. This includes collaboration on:**
 - > the **delivery of programs and services** to the people of Canada, to promote health, prevent illness and injury, and to enhance the health system

 - > **activities that improve service delivery and/or voluntary participation**, such as training, professional education, education of direct service providers, community development, research, evaluation, and development of standards and guidelines

 - > **emerging health issues**

 - > **activities that enhance the relationship** between Health Canada and national voluntary organizations working in health and provide opportunities to work together on specific tasks and projects identified by either NVOWH* or Health Canada.

ACTION:

2. Develop a joint action plan and process for identifying common priorities and opportunities and, for increasing collaboration.

5.3 Capacity of National Voluntary Organizations Working in Health

Health Canada and national voluntary organizations working in health recognize:

- ? the importance of collaboration, a national voice and participation by citizens and communities in health

- ? the significant costs of maintaining a national infrastructure and volunteer

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participation in governance and activities, including national representation, bilingualism, information-sharing, communication, and travel.

- ? the need to build the organizational capacity of national voluntary organizations working in health to enable the sector to collaborate on health policy and programs.

Health Canada and national voluntary organizations working in health agree:

- ? **To enhance individual and collective organizational capacity of NVOWH's to:**

- > increase collaboration with Health Canada
- > take on a greater role in health policy development, implementation and evaluation
- > represent citizen and community interests and views
- > provide a national voice
- > connect with citizens and communities in Canada
- > mobilize participation and action on health
- > ensure accountability.

ACTION:

3. Develop ongoing funding mechanisms, with clearly defined criteria for operational support and projects that enhance the capacity of national voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada to improve the health of the people of Canada and Canada's health system.

5.4 A Collective Commitment

National voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada recognize the need for:

- ? an explicit and collective commitment in order to strengthen the relationship
- ? mechanisms, processes and plans for working both independently and jointly
- ? inclusiveness and participation by the broad range of national voluntary organizations working in health
- ? a better base of knowledge and information on which to build the relationship.

National voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada agree:

- ? **to build a renewed relationship through the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this “Framework for Action”**
- ? **to increase mutual understanding**
- ? **to work toward the development of a policy framework on Voluntary Health Sector and Health Canada relationships. This broader policy needs to be based on a better understanding of:**
 - > relationships between Health Canada and voluntary sector organizations at all levels
 - > the federal/interdepartmental direction with respect to the voluntary sector
 - > the respective roles and relationships between the voluntary health sector and governments at all levels; of particular importance is the role of the voluntary health sector in relation to federal, provincial and territorial collaboration on health
 - > public, private and voluntary sector roles and relationships in health
 - > definitions and descriptions.

ACTION:

4. *Support the development of national mechanisms, processes and plans to help build consensus and take collective action on issues of common interest to national voluntary organizations working in health.*
5. *Identify and establish mechanisms to implement the “Framework for Action”. These mechanisms must be representative of the views and interests of the broad range of national voluntary organizations working in health and the branches within Health Canada.*

6. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Health Policy

1. Develop a joint action plan for enhancing participation of national voluntary organizations working in health in Health Canada's policy processes. This action plan will include concrete and immediate measures for short-term, mid-term and long-term outcomes.

Joint Action Plan on Common Priorities (National Projects)

2. Develop a joint action plan and process for identifying common priorities and opportunities and, for increasing collaboration.

Capacity

3. Develop ongoing funding mechanisms with clearly defined criteria for operational support and projects that enhance the capacity of national voluntary organizations working in health and Health Canada to improve the health of the people of Canada and Canada's health system.

Collective Commitment

4. Support the development of national mechanisms, processes and plans to help build consensus and take collective action on issues of common interest to national voluntary organizations working in health.
5. Identify and establish mechanisms to implement the "Framework for Action". These mechanisms must be representative of the views and interests of the broad range of national voluntary organizations working in health and the branches within Health Canada.