

# How healthy are we?

**A Status  
Report on  
the Health  
of British  
Columbians  
and our  
Health  
System**

**September  
2002**

In 2000, Canada's Prime Minister and Premiers agreed they would start reporting on our health and the state of our health system. British Columbia has just completed its first report, called "How Healthy Are We?" This brochure includes some of the highlights from that report.

The report covers the health of British Columbians, how our health care system is helping people to be healthier, and how well the system is providing quality health services. All provinces used the same information so that we can get a consistent picture of health and health care in Canada. Because this information will be published every two years, we will also be able to see how things

change over time. In addition to the issues highlighted in this brochure, the full report also looks at many others, including preventative care, home care, hospital care and other important information about our health system.

The provincial government is making innovative changes to health care in British Columbia to put patients first and to build a more sustainable, effective health care system. Reports like this one show us the strengths and weaknesses of our health system, what is working well, and what needs improvement.

For more information, see the full report "How Healthy Are We?" at [www.gov.bc.ca/bchealthcare](http://www.gov.bc.ca/bchealthcare).

**Wait times for care are important to Canadians and British Columbians.** BC's reporting on wait times includes information such as:

- Hip Replacements - 18.9 weeks,
- Knee Replacements - 23 weeks,
- Cardiac Surgery - 25 days

**Breast, prostate cancer patients live longer:** BC has among the highest survival rates in Canada for breast and prostate cancer, with 91% of prostate patients and 85% of breast cancer patients alive five years after diagnosis.

**Increasing concern over diabetes in BC:** While diabetes – a chronic disease related to many other conditions – is slightly less common in BC than the Canadian average, more than one in eight seniors has diabetes. Effective management will become increasingly important as BC's population ages.

## British Columbians are living longer than ever

A baby born in BC today can expect to live to be 80 years old. This is the best life expectancy in our province's history. Life expectancy in BC increased by four years between 1979 and 1999.



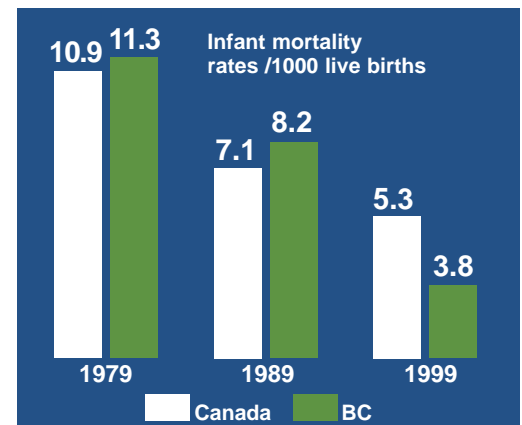
## Large majority have a family doctor



More than 90 per cent of British Columbians have a regular family doctor – an important part of quality, ongoing health care. Like people living in most provinces, a large majority of British Columbians benefit from this important connection to the health system.

## BC babies among the healthiest in the world

BC babies are less likely to be born at a low birth weight and less likely to die during their first year of life than in any other province. The BC infant mortality rate is among the world's best, and has been improving steadily.



## First HIV increase in



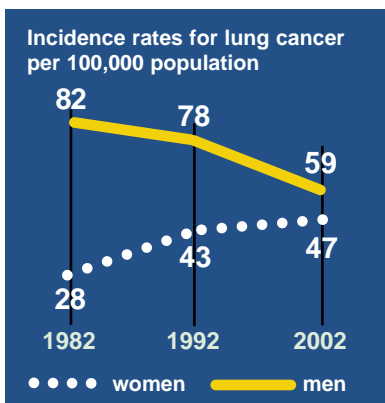
In 2001, BC saw its first increase in the number of positive HIV tests in five years. Although the increase is small, it is cause for concern, and the Province is developing a strategic plan to deal with it.

## BC patients satisfied with health services

Nearly nine out of every ten British Columbians are either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with how health services are provided – slightly higher than the Canadian average and evidence that our health system continues to do a good job for most people.



**Routine care no problem for vast majority:** More than nine out of ten British Columbians say they have no problem getting routine or ongoing health care – again, evidence that the system generally is working well.



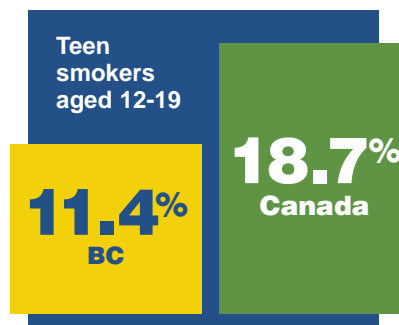
## Lung cancer threatens more BC women

Over the past 25 years, lung cancer in women has more than doubled in BC. Over the same period, the rate among men has dropped.

**Most get immediate care when they need it:** When British Columbians need immediate care for a minor health problem, more than seven out of eight say they have no difficulty getting it.

## Teen smoking far below Canadian average

Far fewer BC young people smoke as compared to the average across Canada. Before BC adopted tough anti-smoking measures for youth, our province was around the national average. That has since changed dramatically for the better.



**Fewer are exposed to tobacco smoke in BC:** BC has the lowest rates of exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke of all Canadian provinces. The rate is still too high, especially for young people between 12 and 19 – almost a third of people in this age group are regularly exposed to tobacco smoke.

## Seniors living more years disability-free



BC seniors tend to live more years disability-free than the Canadian average. As of 1996, the average in BC was 68.9 years disability-free – second in Canada only to Quebec.

**More BC seniors need to get flu shots:** BC ranks sixth in the country; to protect the health of seniors, even more need to get flu shots each winter.

**We're more physically active, but not enough:**

Although more British Columbians are physically active than the Canadian average, nearly four in ten still aren't active – which is a serious public health issue.

**More than 40% of British Columbians are overweight:**

Being overweight is related to chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, so it's a major health issue.

**Community care reducing the need for hospitalization:**

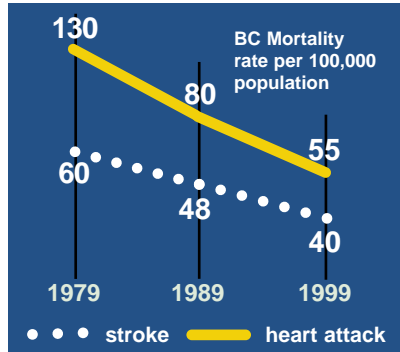
Between 1995/96 and 1999/2000, 15% fewer British Columbians were admitted to hospital for conditions which could be treated in the community. This means we are using our hospitals more appropriately.



**BRITISH COLUMBIA**

Ministry of Health Planning

## Heart disease and strokes killing fewer



Over the past 20 years, there has been a dramatic drop in the death rates due to heart attacks and strokes, which shows how successful we have been at preventing, detecting and treating cardiovascular disease. The rate of deaths due to heart attack is down by more than half, while stroke deaths are down by a third.

## Healthy today – working for a healthy tomorrow

As the information in this brochure shows, British Columbians are generally healthy and have a quality health system they can depend on. The BC government is working to build on this foundation and to make sure health services will continue to be there when British Columbians need them.

The BC government wants to improve the quality of care for British Columbians, while making the system sustainable for the future. Reports such as this one will continue to show how we are doing – making our health system as transparent as possible.

To improve health care quality, the Province has introduced standards of care that make it clear that everyone deserves quality care no matter where they live in BC. It's why the government has developed performance agreements with health authorities to make sure precious health care dollars are well spent. It's why the government is investing in vital areas of the system, such as improved ambulance services. And it's why we

are releasing reports like this one to keep the system accountable to all British Columbians.

As you can see, British Columbia's health system does work. However, bold steps need to be taken to keep it sustainable for the future. In moving towards sustainability, the government is giving special attention to important areas such as:

- Primary health care so people with chronic conditions, like diabetes, get the care they need, when they need it.
- New approaches for mental health so that those with problems get the right kinds of services and support.
- Making innovative, independent living options available to help seniors live with dignity and security in their community for as long as possible.

For more information on health and the health system in BC, visit [www.gov.bc.ca/bchealthcare](http://www.gov.bc.ca/bchealthcare).