



## National Collaborating Centre Program A Brief Overview

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The National Collaborating Centres for Public Health (NCCPH) is an initiative launched in 2004 by the Government of Canada as part of its contribution to strengthening and renewing public health capacity in Canada.

### **BACKGROUND**

Recent challenges in managing public health risks in Canada have highlighted the urgent need to invest in strengthening our overall public health capacity. In particular, expert assessments of Canada's response to the 2003 SARS outbreak revealed an inadequate knowledge and evidence base to inform the development of public health programs, policies, and practices. Relevant evidence for public health decisions is not always available, and when it is available, it is often not accessible in a format that can be easily used by practitioners, especially front-line practitioners working at the community level.

The NCCPH initiative aims to address these deficiencies by facilitating and promoting the use of evidence in public health practice and policy development across Canada. Working with stakeholders in priority public health areas, each National Collaborating Centre created under this initiative is mandated to provide and promote evidence-based and expertise-based knowledge, mechanisms and tools to improve practice throughout Canada's public health system.

### **VISION**

*The National Collaborating Centres are a key part of the strategy of the Government of Canada to support public health renewal in Canada. The Centres will promote and improve the use of scientific and other knowledge to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Canada's public health system. They will translate research into knowledge products that are readily available and accessible to public health practitioners, foster linkages among researchers, the public health community and other stakeholders, and promote the sharing of knowledge across this network to enhance public health practice across Canada.*

### **PROGRESS TO DATE**

Six Centres have now been established under the NCCPH program. Each operates "arm's length" from the Government, is sponsored by a regional host institution, and has been given a national mandate to promote evidence-informed decision-making in a specific public health priority area, as follows:

- *Aboriginal Health* sited at University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), British Columbia;
- *Determinants of Health* sited at St. Francis Xavier University, Atlantic;
- *Environmental Health* sited at British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC), British Columbia;
- *Infectious Diseases* sited at International Centre for Infectious Diseases (ICID), Winnipeg;
- *Healthy Public Policy* sited at Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ), Quebec; and
- *Methods and Tools* sited at McMaster University, Ontario.



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The NCCPH initiative is funded by the Government of Canada and supported by a dedicated Secretariat at the Public Health Agency of Canada. The initiative is guided by an advisory council of national and international public health experts.

### MANDATE

National Collaborating Centres provide a national focus for the synthesis, transfer and exchange of scientific and other relevant knowledge in priority areas of public health. The priorities and activities the Centres must be aligned with national health goals set by the Public Health Agency of Canada and Pan-Canadian Public Health Network. The Centres collaborate with each other, and with regional, national and international experts from academic centres, non-governmental organizations, as well as provincial/territorial/regional-local governments throughout the public health system.

### KEY ACTIVITIES

Several key activities have been identified as critical to the work and success of the Centres:

- **Knowledge Synthesis.** The Centres synthesize existing global public health knowledge of relevance to Canada's public health needs in the three core areas of public health: health protection, disease and injury prevention, and health promotion. By drawing together information from different sources in new ways, the Centres create knowledge products useful to policy makers and to those practising at the front lines in public health.
- **Identification of Knowledge Gaps.** Through synthesis activities, additional areas and knowledge gaps can be identified in which there is insufficient evidence to inform public health programs, policies and practices. The Centres provide an opportunity to stimulate the development of new applied research to address these gaps. The Centres may advocate for applied research initiatives (e.g. with research funding agencies) or develop linkages with others who will take the lead role.
- **Knowledge Translation.** The Centres promote the exchange of knowledge to help users understand and interpret information, and to apply it when making decisions about practices, policies and programs. Given the diversity of sectors and disciplines engaged in public health in Canada, the Centres do not use a 'one size fits all' approach. They are involved in a range of activities to address the needs of program managers, policy makers and practitioners, and use existing networks and preferred ways for sharing information.
- **Network Development.** The Centres encourage, participate in, and enhance the development of networks across the Centres and at regional, provincial, national and international levels. Networks may include 'communities of practice', virtual networks, and collaborative efforts to identify and champion best practices in selected areas of public health.



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### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The work of each NCC aims to be...

- **Relevant.** NCC initiatives should reflect the needs of practitioners, and be aligned with Canada's overall public health strategy, and the work of the Public Health Agency of Canada and Pan-Canadian Public Health Network
- **Interconnected.** NCCs should strengthen linkages between public health researchers and practitioners at regional, provincial, national and international levels
- **Coordinated.** NCCs should set priorities and operate as members of a network, and focus on national public health priorities
- **Complementary.** NCCs should complement the work of PHAC and other federal partners, provincial governments, academic institutions, and other key stakeholders
- **Interdisciplinary.** NCCs should support and engage all major public health disciplines operating at the municipal, provincial, regional and national levels across Canada
- **Participatory.** NCCs should adopt a participatory approach and involve all relevant stakeholders in planning and implementing initiatives

### GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Within the five-year mandate defined for the Centres, it is expected that the Centres will have pursued the following goals, and achieved the following outcomes:

#### Goals

Existing knowledge will be translated into useful evidence for public health decision-makers

Gaps in knowledge and in relevant applied research will inform new research initiatives across Canada

New and strengthened networks of regional, national and international expertise and practice across the domains of public health will be formed to address public health priorities, and inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programs and practices

#### Outcomes

Public health practitioners are aware of, trust, and regularly use, knowledge products generated by the Centres

There is increased use of new evidence in critical areas by public health policy makers, program managers and practitioners

National and international networks and collaboration, facilitated by the Centres, have resulted in the increased application of knowledge to achieve improvements in public health policies and practices



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Evidence will be used to support the development of sustainable mechanisms to continuously improve the quality, impact and efficiency of public health programs, policies and practices

Mechanisms are in place to support sustained and durable collaborative networks focused on using knowledge to inform public health policies, programs and practice

For further information contact:

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