DATA HEALTH EQUITY community

The last three annual reports issued by Dr. David Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, are part of a series that sets out practical strategies to enhance community health and wellness.

The key messages in these reports are interdependent: better data will help us understand our communities' health issues and identify people and populations facing health inequities, and investing in stronger, more connected communities can improve health and be a protective, sustainable way to enhance health equity.
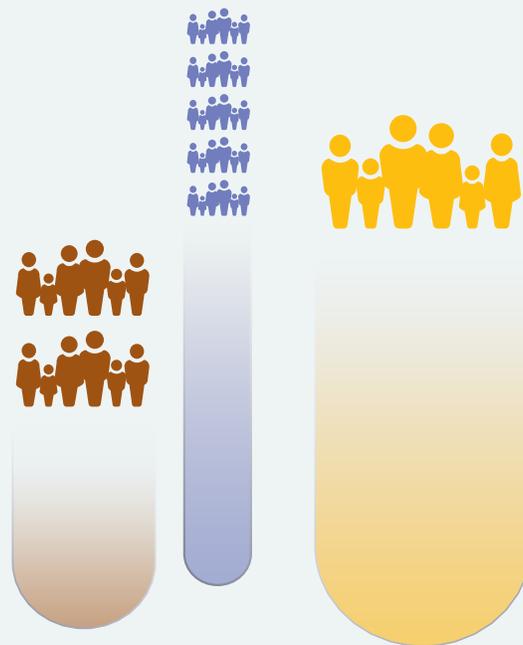
MAPPING WELLNESS: Ontario's Route to Healthier Communities

The first in the series of reports talks about the importance of collecting good local data to understand people's health and make informed, evidence-based decisions to improve health.

Key Messages

- Relevant, timely, consistent population health data is critical to be able to map community wellness, identify health issues at the neighbourhood level and target programs and services to those in greatest need

- With good data, local health jurisdictions can empower their communities to take action on urgent health needs

- When members of the community understand the complex social, economic and environmental factors that affect their health, they are more likely to mobilize and create partnerships to address issues that can range from low immunization rates to lack of affordable housing

RECOMMENDATIONS

Understand our Communities: Implement a provincial population health survey that collects data at the local community and neighborhood levels

Share with our Communities: Give the public and community partners access to more integrated and meaningful information

Invest in our Communities: Use the data to improve wellness and delay or avoid unnecessary health care spending

Strengthen our Communities: Use the data to reduce health disparities and reinforce health equity in Ontario

IMPROVING THE ODDS: Championing Health Equity in Ontario

This was an urgent call to tackle the social, economic and environmental determinants of health and ensure all Ontarians – regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, social class, geography, socioeconomic status or other social circumstances – have the opportunity to be as healthy as possible.

Key Messages

- All Ontarians should have the opportunity to be as healthy as possible, yet many face unfair disadvantages that threaten their health (e.g., low incomes, lack of education and employment opportunities, lack of access to stable housing and healthy food, violence and social isolation)

- The public health sector should treat social inequities with the same urgency as managing outbreaks of infectious diseases

- It's time to champion health equity: to bring a wide range of partners together to develop policies and programs that reduce or eliminate social, economic and environmental barriers to good health

- Community members should come together to implement community development interventions to solve common problems and improve health

RECOMMENDATIONS

Champion Community Development: Support public health units to identify "outbreaks" of health inequities and plan effective, sustainable community development interventions

Pursue Partnerships: Work system-wide and government-wide – reaching out to sectors beyond health – to improve health equity

Collect Local Data: Gather local, neighbourhood level data to help communities understand and address health inequities through targeted community development initiatives

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES: Healthier Together

This report highlights the growing problem of social isolation and asks us all to strengthen our social connections and build more connected and healthier communities.

Key Messages

- Being connected to other people is essential to our well-being, yet a growing number of Ontarians are feeling socially isolated

- Our sense of belonging is being threatened by changes in family and social structures, work and time pressures, new technologies and economic pressures/income inequality

- Individuals, organizations, businesses, communities and governments must work together to create a society that values and invests in social connection and community

- Strong, resilient communities reduce social isolation

RECOMMENDATIONS

Invest in Community: Governments should highlight the critical importance of connected communities and foster their growth

Enable Community: Public health units – uniquely positioned between communities and different levels of government – should play a lead role in enabling community

Be Community-Centred and Community-Driven: We should challenge ourselves and each other to make community health and well-being a priority