

COMMUNIQUÉ

Atlantic provinces explore regional strategies to promote health November 14, 2008

CHARLOTTETOWN – Improving the health of Atlantic Canadians was the focus today as the four Atlantic provinces came together for the forum *Wellness...A Shared Responsibility – We All Have A Role To Play*. Success stories in positively impacting the health of the region's residents were highlighted, along with the need to continue to address the challenges to achieve optimal health and wellbeing.

Ministers responsible for health and wellness from the four Atlantic provinces met in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, to collaborate on the promotion of health and wellness. The forum provided an opportunity for government, health promotion organizations, and community leaders to collaborate on how to support healthy choices for all Atlantic Canadians.

Hon. Doug Currie, PEI Minister of Health and Hon. Carolyn Bertram, PEI Minister of Communities, Cultural Affairs and Labour, hosted the forum and were joined by Hon. Hédard Albert, New Brunswick Minister of Wellness, Culture and Sport, Hon. Clyde Jackman, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Terry French, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and Community Services and Minister Responsible for Aging and Seniors for Newfoundland and Labrador. Duff Montgomerie, Deputy Minister of Nova Scotia's Department of Health Promotion and Protection, attended the forum on behalf of Minister Barry Barnett.

"The composition of Atlantic Canada's population is changing rapidly," noted Minister Currie. "By 2021 approximately one in four Atlantic Canadians will be a senior citizen. This change in demographics will place an increased pressure on health systems to manage and reduce the incidence of chronic disease. I strongly support a collaborative approach between the Atlantic provinces to promote the health and wellness of Atlantic Canadians and this forum offers the opportunity for us to work together and learn from each other as we plan future initiatives."

The promotion of healthy options and support programs were discussed as areas where the benefits of regional collaboration might be achieved by building on the many successful initiatives already undertaken by the provinces. Coordination of efforts between provincial governments and stakeholders could potentially enhance current initiatives by leveraging expertise, making better use of available resources, both human and financial, and avoiding duplication of effort.

"A lot of work has been done in New Brunswick in the area of wellness, and we can be proud of the results we have achieved to date," said Minister of Wellness, Culture and Sport of New Brunswick Hédard Albert. "However, there is still a great deal left to be done, and we must continue our efforts to deal with the wellness challenges by forging strong ties with our regional, provincial, Atlantic, and national partners. For that reason, I am very hopeful that ministerial

meetings like this one today will help us all work together to improve the wellness of our population.”

"I am pleased that this group, consisting of Atlantic, provincial, and community leaders, is eager to work together to improve the lives of Atlantic Canadians," said Hon. Carolyn Bertram, PEI Minister of Communities, Cultural Affairs and Labour. "Through cooperation, education and sharing, we have a wonderful opportunity to help Atlantic Canadians make healthy eating and activity choices. Working together, we can be models for Canada - active and healthy citizens!"

Dr. Michael Vallis delivered a poignant message about the motivational and environmental factors which influence individuals' behaviours. Several panel discussions provided an opportunity for the participants to hear from groups and stakeholders about successful initiatives that have been implemented at the community and school levels.

"Healthy aging is a key component to overall wellness that is greatly impacted by our daily choices," said Minister Wiseman. "We all have a role to play in fostering an environment that enhances our potential for enjoying good health and wellbeing. Newfoundland and Labrador has made great strides in this area with major initiatives such as our Healthy Aging Strategy, Provincial Wellness Plan, and multifaceted approach to reducing tobacco use. We must continue to focus our efforts in these areas, especially as our population ages and the incidence of chronic disease increases."

"The success of our efforts to influence the wellness of individuals will be a function of many factors," said Minister Jackman. "By focusing on the key determinants of good health and working towards meeting the newly established physical activity targets for children and youth, we will help increase the number of Atlantic Canadians maintaining healthy, active lifestyles."

The Atlantic ministers responsible for health and wellness will rely on the information that was shared among the forum participants to assess where opportunities may exist to collaborate as they prepare to address these challenges.

The forum was sponsored by the Council of Atlantic Premiers which was established in 2000 to coordinate joint activity in areas of mutual agreement to achieve results together that may not be achievable alone. Today's event fulfills part of its mandate to consult on regional approaches to the management of risk factors associated with chronic disease and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

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