
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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Sept. 28, 2010

Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport
Ministry of Health Services

INVESTING IN PREVENTION LEADS TO BETTER HEALTH

VANCOUVER – A strengthened provincial strategy and investment in prevention can improve the health of British Columbians and potentially avoid up to \$2 billion in yearly health-care costs, according to a report released today by provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall.

The report, *Investing in Prevention*, found that focused prevention activities and a provincial, population-based, healthy-living strategy could reduce the burden of disease on families and communities; delay the need for health-care services; and reduce the impact of disease, disability and premature death on the economy.

“While some have suggested that prolonging life through health promotion only results in increasing medical costs as people live longer in poor health, this argument is fundamentally unethical and unsubstantiated,” said Kendall. “Currently, too many British Columbians consume too much of the wrong food and drink, have reduced access to healthy foods, get too little physical activity and live in environments that are less than fully supportive of active, healthy living opportunities.”

The report also considers the economic burden of such risk behaviours and conditions as obesity, physical inactivity, tobacco use and the problematic use of alcohol.

“This report builds a comprehensive and compelling case for how effective public-health programming can help British Columbians get and stay healthy,” said Minister of Healthy Living and Sport Ida Chong. “As the report recommends, the Province is already working to enhance its comprehensive healthy living strategy, and we expect it will be in place before the end of the year.”

According to research, if all British Columbians had a normal weight (BMI between 20 and 24.9) and did not smoke, the cost avoidance for B.C.’s health-care system could reach \$2 billion each year.

“We know that chronic disease treatment and complications cost the Province billions of dollars each year,” said Minister of Health Services Kevin Falcon. “In order to keep our health-care system sustainable in the long term, we remain committed to finding new and better ways to give people the tools to take ownership of their health and to make healthier choices.”

In releasing his report, Kendall acknowledged that B.C. has received Canada-wide acknowledgement for its investments, both with regard to research and in terms of resourcing in public health over the last decade.

A copy of Lifetime of Prevention can be viewed on the provincial health officer's website at: www.hls.gov.bc.ca/pho

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A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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INVESTING IN PREVENTION HIGHLIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The provincial health officer's 2008 special report, Investing in Prevention, makes the case that continued and enhanced investment in a comprehensive prevention strategy can improve the health of British Columbians, reduce inequalities in health, and contribute to the financial sustainability of B.C.'s publicly funded provincial health care system.

Among its highlights, the report shows that the child poverty rate dropped by almost 50 per cent between 2003 and 2008. It also shows a decline of over 50 per cent in the rate of low-income, female lone-parent families between 2006 and 2008.

Investing in Prevention recommends that government should focus prevention activities in five broad policy areas:

- Build upon the foundational whole-of-government approach embodied in ActNow BC and commit to ensuring, with community partners, that the healthiest choice is always the easiest choice.
- Recommit to early childhood development. The report, 15 by 15: A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC, produced by the Human Early Learning Partnership, provides a blueprint for government to follow.
- Look at those provinces and territories that have committed to poverty reduction (e.g., Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Yukon) and create a "Made in B.C." program.
- Further strengthen the public health services provided by B.C.'s health authorities, building on the nationally recognized efforts to develop evidence-based core public health programs for B.C.
- Continue to work with the British Columbia Medical Association and other organizations of health professional to build a primary-care system that will effectively deliver evidence-based, lifetime preventive services and integrate prevention into chronic disease management.

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