



# PUBLIC HEALTH ACT PROPOSAL

## Renewing BC Public Health Legislation



Discussion Paper 2

December 2004

# Requirements of Population Health Planning

## BACKGROUND

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The Ministry of Health Services is required by legislation to develop a service plan through the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*, and health authorities are required to provide service redesign plans through performance agreements. However, these do not address the need for a comprehensive plan that focuses government, health authorities, and other sectors action towards protecting and improving the health of the population – a population health plan.

This paper proposes a planning requirement in the new public health act for the minister and health authorities to ensure that a population health plan is developed and regularly updated. Planning is often sidelined by the pressures of the day, and a legislated requirement would

- underscore the importance that government places on health promotion and protection. This is similar to the requirements for municipalities to develop emergency plans,
- ensure that the public health responsibilities which government has delegated to Health Authorities are being met,
- ensure that government discharges its own planning responsibility, and
- provide an enduring statement of the importance of this activity.

At the same time, planning requirements would be flexible enough to ensure that current ministry and Health Authorities planning will be part of the development of a population health plan, so as not to duplicate effort.

Planning is a disciplined yet dynamic activity. Appropriate planning requirements in legislation ensure that planning occurs in a way that is meaningful, is used to guide action, and is not simply an exercise to be filed once done.

In this regard, it is the planning process that is often more important than the “plan” that is developed. Consequently, planning requirements in legislation are more about ensuring that certain processes happen.

Planning requirements are also warranted due to the fundamental importance of public health protection, and the dire consequences of public health protection failures such as the Walkerton tainted water crisis. Proper planning will assist in improving efficiency, enhancing sustainability, and in dealing the underlying causes of poor health.

In Quebec the *Public Health Act* requires the minister to develop a plan that contains objectives related to surveillance of health status and health determinants; the prevention of diseases, trauma, and social problems that have an impact on the health of the population; the promotion of systemic measures capable of fostering the enhancement of the health and well-being of the population; and the protection of the health of the population, including vulnerable groups.

A requirement to develop a population health plan will ensure that the minister and Health Authorities address, in a coordinated manner, critical elements of public health activity – collective action; the population wide focus; and the intersectoral and cross government (both vertical and horizontal) mode of public health action. This goes beyond “services” and organization to address underlying determinants of health.

## PROPOSAL

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It is proposed that population health planning be included in a new public health act to:

- Provide a clear understanding of the direction of public health activity through establishment of public health principles, mission, goals, and objectives.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities that various parties have to achieve agreed upon goals and objectives.
- Assist in ensuring that the critical intersectoral collaboration and partnerships necessary for public health success does occur.

Planning requirements will not be prescriptive and detailed to avoid become onerous and an end unto themselves. By focusing on process and not detailed content, planning requirements can allow for flexibility and innovation. Much of the current planning activity of the ministry and health authorities would in fact meet the requirements, and would be part of the population health plan.

It is envisaged that there would be a requirement in the new act for the Minister of Health Services to lead the development of a provincial population health plan. For example, there could be a statement such as: “To ensure the protection and promotion of health, and the consistent provision of core public health functions, the Minister shall create a comprehensive provincial population health plan that assesses and sets public health priorities for the province and provides a framework to guide regional and local population health planning. The provincial population health plan shall be developed in a collaborative manner and take into account federal, other ministry, Health Authority, and other related plans.”

Specific elements of the planning process would be described within guidelines, regulations or policy.

In a similar fashion there could be a requirement in the new act for Health Authorities to develop population health plans, such as: “To ensure the protection and promotion of health, and the provision of core public health functions, the regional health board shall create a comprehensive regional population health plan, in collaboration with the ministry, that assesses and sets public health priorities for the region. This plan shall be consistent with the provincial population health plan and take into account municipal, regional district, First Nations, and other plans as they relate to public health.” Again specific elements of the Health Authorities plans could be prescribed in guidelines, regulations, or policy.

The Minister may include in the guidelines, policy, or regulations such elements as:

- principles, mission, goals, and objectives for public health in British Columbia;
- identification of specific recommendations for meeting these goals;
- implementation of core functions for public health throughout the province;
- information on the scope of the plan, what kind of consultation should be undertaken, what shall be included and/or addressed in the plan, what time period the plan should cover, and evaluation of the plan;
- identification of key stakeholders;
- identification and quantification of existing public health problems, disparities, or threats at the provincial and regional levels;
- explanation for the prioritization of one or more public health problems, disparities, or threats;
- identification of the specific at-risk populations targeted;
- detailed description of the programs and activities that will be pursued to address existing public health problems, disparities, or threats;
- tracking the allocation of provincial resources to public health;

- estimated of costs of implementing the plan;
- time-line for implementing various elements of the plan;
- strategy for coordinating public health service delivery; and
- measurable indicators of effectiveness and success.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

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1. Should population health planning requirements of the minister and Health Authorities be included in legislation?
2. If so, what elements of population health planning should be included in legislation?
3. Are there other elements of population health planning not identified here that should be included in either legislation or required by other mechanisms?
4. Do you have any other comments regarding population health planning?

## **COMMENTS**

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Please send comments to [HLTH.Phactrenewal@gems8.gov.bc.ca](mailto:HLTH.Phactrenewal@gems8.gov.bc.ca) or by writing, faxing or phoning:

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