



United Nations Association in Canada
Association canadienne pour les nations unies

The 26th of May 2008

Presentation to the Subcommittee on Population Health of the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, on key findings from UNA-Canada's Healthy Children, Healthy Communities initiative.

By Kathryn White
Executive Director of the United Nations Association in Canada

Chair and Honourable Senators,

On behalf of the United Nations Association in Canada, I would like to thank you for this special invitation to present to you our work on the Social Determinants of Health. I would also like to pay tribute to the work of this subcommittee, to Monique Bégin with the WHO commission on the Social Determinants of Health and a very special tribute to one of your former member who has been a keen supporter of our work and an inspiration for her advocacy for the children of Canada and the world: Landon Pearson.

[slide nu. 2: HC² vision] UNA-Canada's *Healthy Children, Healthy Communities* project was designed to 1) identify and explore social and community factors by which to build positive well-being and stronger, more cohesive communities and 2) engage young people, as they have not been engaged in the past, in both understanding and making recommendations on their own health. These goals have been guided by the existence of key international documents such as the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, *A World Fit for Children*, and *A Canada Fit for Children*. [slide nu. 3: HC² communities] By upholding the principles outlined in these

documents, we went to the children themselves – to young people across the country and encouraged them to share with us their stories, voices, concerns and visions for healthy communities. But, we did not stop there. We also surveyed child health stakeholders like parents, community administrators and health care specialists, as well as the Canadian public, to help us better understand the social conditions which affect the lives of Canada’s young people. Our research led us to publish *Talking Back to Grownups* in October of 2007 – a report we encourage you all to read, if you have not already done so. Since then the team has developed resource material to continue the engagement of young people through a pan Canadian youth network and a 65 page *Action Toolkit for Positive Change*. Furthermore, this past March we held a National Roundtable exploring *youth engagement, media and technology, and the affects of the built environment on health*. Finally next week we will publish our newest study, based on continued research in British Columbia, exploring the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in relation to health and the global context.

Poverty: a High Priority Social Determinant of Health

In survey after survey, Canadians are expressing the need of addressing poverty in all its forms here at home and abroad. As a collective, we need to recognize its profound negative impacts on health, especially the health of children whose first years will set the stage for a lifetime of health care access and consumption. In UNA-Canada’s *Talking Back to Grownups* report, three quarters (74%) of participating adult Canadians expressed the need to end child poverty, even if it meant raising taxes, and approximately two thirds (61%) told us they believe Canadian governments are putting too low a priority on child health programming.

[slide nu. 4 & 5: Health status] According to our indicators on emotional wellbeing in children, the trends demonstrate inequalities between Caucasian, Aboriginal and Ethno Cultural

populations and high/low socio-economic groups. These numbers are not new to any of us but, as we met with hundreds of children across the country, it became clear that we can see visible impacts of these pressures in children as early as 9 years of age.

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Other key findings demonstrate a continued stigmatization of mental and emotional health issues through significant disconnects in its basic understanding. [slide nu. 6-7: quotes, mental health disconnect] Our research has shown that 98% of adult Canadians believe that emotional well-being is just as important as physical health, but only 7% of Canadians believe that young people need to receive more information on these topics. Let us consider what young people have told us: [slide nu. 8: emotional well-being indicators]. Our research used a number of indicators to gauge the level of emotional well-being of young people. In asking, *I worry about life* and *I worry about my family's health*, respectively 62% and 40% of youth agreed. The level of worry exhibited here reinforces the concern that unhealthy stress factors are a growing problem and need greater resources and attention. Evidently, many Canadians that we spoke with outlined that there is a significant lack of mental health specialists and services, particularly in rural or remote communities. Our strategies must integrate advocacy for good mental health as aggressively as we have with physical health through strong social marketing. On this, we also applaud the creation of the Mental Health Commission of Canada, lead by your colleague, former Senator Michael Kirby.

Solutions and Recommendations

You should know we've just touched on only some of the issues covered in our 3 years of research. **So where do we go from here? How do we begin addressing some of the health issues raised by the young people themselves?**

The social determinants of health are about relationships, culture, individual sense of belonging and attachment to the community and, most importantly, about engagement and a sense of choice or control. Good health is good citizenship. Today, we recommend the following steps forward.

1. Focus on emotional well-being and mental health through targeted public education and outreach.


2. Strengthen communities to improve health outcomes. We call for further research into what both the built community and the social community can do to increase good health outcomes. Community level differences are occurring across various indicators. Further research is needed to identify factors at the community level that contribute to young people's health, as well as community-specific solutions. We need to begin looking at the neighborhoods in which people live and work and evaluate if they are organized in such a way that allows people to lead flourishing lives.

3. Create integrative and cohesive health policies and practices focusing on the social determinants of health. Children's lives are shaped by three key parts of society: parents/guardians, the school, and the community as a whole. Health policies MUST focus on ensuring mutually supportive roles. Parents and guardians must have the ability to play an active and positive role in the lives of their children; the school must be a place where they can grow and be empowered to take action in their own lives; and the community must be a place where positive relationships and connections are formed and reinforced.

4. Focus on vulnerable youth. The importance of placing special attention on Aboriginal and Visible Minority young Canadians cannot be overemphasized. These young people consistently bear the burden of lower standards of living, poorer quality of life and unequal distribution of

resources. We must understand their realities and realize that these are issues of CHILD RIGHTS – and the responsibilities lie with adults.



5. Give a voice to children and communities and amplify this voice as necessary. Child and citizen health empowerment is perhaps the most important role that civil society, government and the health care sector can play together. We recognize the work that is already being done by so many civil society organizations in strengthening the voice of young people, and commend them. We also urge government to increase commitments to this. The Government of Canada has shown their leadership through their unswerving support of UNA-Canada's HC² initiative by encouraging our exploration for a deeper understanding of the affects of the Social Determinants of Health on Canadian children.


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 2010 Legacies Now


 What is HC²?
 

Vision Statement

To engage Canadians, including children in learning about and raising awareness of the social factors that affect the health of kids aged 9-12 years old. We envision a healthy society in which children's health is a national priority and children themselves are engaged in understanding and influencing their own well-being.

Notre vision

Engager les canadiens et canadiennes de tous âges à apprendre et se conscientiser des facteurs sociaux affectant la santé des jeunes âgés entre 9 et 12 ans. Nous envisageons une société où la santé des enfants est une priorité nationale et où les enfants eux-mêmes s'engagent à comprendre et influencer leur propre bien-être.

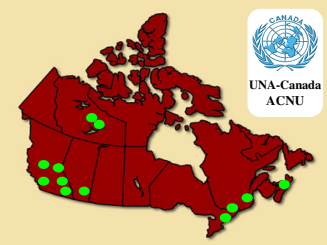

HC² Across Canada

National Project

- Ottawa, ON
 - Français et/and English
- Calgary, AB
- Yellowknife, NWT
- Behchoko, NWT
- Antigonish, NS
- Montréal, QC
 - Français et/and English
- Peterborough, ON
- Vancouver, BC


Other BC Communities:

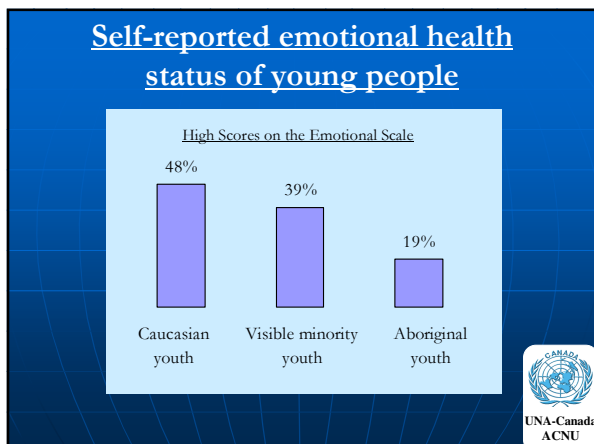
- Castlegar, Prince Georges,
- Kelowna, Terrace

Health status by socio-economic status (%)


		Fair or poor	Good	V. good or excellent
Socio-economic status of young people's parents/guardians	Professional	↓ 2%	18%	↑ 80%
	Employed	↓ 8%	27%	↑ 65%
	Unemployed	↓ 8%	31%	↑ 61%
Socio-economic status of adults	Under \$20,000	↑ 30%	30%	↓ 39%
	\$20,000-39,999	↑ 17%	35%	↓ 49%
	\$40,000-59,999	↑ 9%	34%	↓ 58%
	\$60,000-\$75,000	↑ 5%	29%	↓ 65%
	Over \$75,000	↑ 5%	26%	↓ 69%





"If I call a parent up and mention mental health in the same sentence as their child's name, there's a stigma and it's scary."
 [Peterborough]

"There's a lack of mental health services and lack of continuity in mental health care. If kids aren't suicidal, they are released back into the community."
 [Montreal]

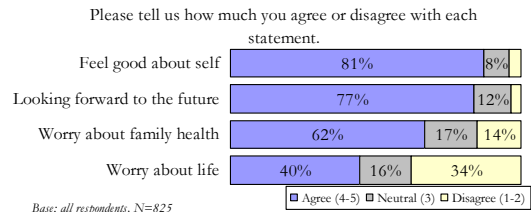


Mental and Emotional Health perception disconnect

- 98% of adult respondents agree Emotional Health is as important as Physical Health
- What health topics do you think young people need to have more information about? (total mentions)
 - 7% Emotions – depression and self esteem (1,200 adult respondents)
- Has an adult ever talked to you about the following?
 - 26% Emotions – depression and self esteem (825 youth respondents)



Emotional Well-Being Indicators



Who is responsible for young people's health?

92% - Parents and Guardians

73% - Childcare providers

36% - Community, neighbours and adults



Solutions and Recommendations

1. Focus on emotional well-being and mental health through targeted public education and outreach.
2. Strengthen communities to improve health outcomes.
3. Create integrative and cohesive health policies and practices.
4. Focus on vulnerable youth.
5. Give a voice to children and communities.



Child Health Rights Declaration Castlegar B.C.



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Thank YOU!
MERCI!





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Statement from Ophelia's Voice to Senate Subcommittee on Population Health:

Ophelia's Voice is a youth-initiated nonprofit organization based in Sherwood Park, Alberta to promote the education, leadership, engagement, and healthy well-being of girls and young women. The group has participated as youth advisors to the Healthy Children, Healthy Communities (HC²) Project and 5 of its members aged 12 - 16 attended the HC² National Roundtable in March 2008.

As youth ourselves we believe that the capacity to improve the health of our communities rests in the responsibility of young people. The youth of Canada need to take ownership of their health and civic engagement and be key stakeholders in helping to foster healthy communities for future generations. We perceive a healthy community as holistic, engaging, and innovative. Population health, to us, embodies an approach that is grassroots, multidisciplinary and allows young people to represent their own realities and use these experiences to initiate social change. Young people can be the visionaries and changemakers for this movement if they are supported and authentically engaged. Fostering healthy young people is also the responsibility of the community at large, and we promote an approach that is rooted in the developmental assets, prevention, and sustainability. Viewing youth as the future is ignorant of our present skills, qualities, and abilities – as the most important stakeholders in healthy community development; we can be at the forefront to affect change now. Thank you.

- the participants of Ophelia's Voice

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