

## Vancouver Coastal Health Population Health Health Inequities: Background and Resources

### **Background**

Within our population, there are differences and variations in the health status of individuals and groups. *Health inequity* refers to those differences in health status that are deemed to be unfair or stemming from some form of injustice. Initiatives across the globe are highlighting the dramatic impact of social and economic conditions on health inequities. These conditions are often referred to as the social determinants of health and include factors such as income, education, early child development and housing. VCH is committed to addressing the social determinants of health and has developed a Population Health strategy. This strategy represents an opportunity to inform its staff, partners and the public about population health and the types of actions that can be taken to promote the health of populations and communities.

### **Purpose**

- To provide leadership around the social determinants of health by promoting awareness and understanding of the causes of health inequities and the impact that they have on our society. Key audiences include health service providers, health and wellness networks, community leaders and decision makers.
- To assist various VCH teams, partners and external decision makers to take action on health inequities through population health approaches. Intended outcomes include increasing the ability of the health system to provide service for vulnerable populations, stimulating community groups to take advocacy action and promoting understanding of healthy public policy alternatives among decision makers.

## **Key Messages**

- On average, British Columbia has excellent health outcomes, but if you look closer you will see that health is not distributed equally.
- Measures such as life expectancy and chronic disease indicate a significant association with social and economic factors such as income and education. The likelihood of doing/having risk behaviours (i.e., smoking, unhealthy eating, lack of physical activity) increases as you move down the socioeconomic gradient.
- This phenomenon does not only affect the lowest income groups. If you divide society into income divisions, each higher division has better health outcomes.
- These differences in health outcomes are highly related to the social determinants of health (i.e., housing, access to early childhood supports, recreation, income, etc). In fact, about half of the variations found among populations are attributable to socioeconomic conditions.
- The sustainability of our health care system depends on addressing the social determinants of health such as housing, early child development.

## **Discussion Questions**

Tackling health inequities requires widening our lens to bring into view the ways in which jobs, working conditions, education, housing, social inclusion, and even political power influence individual and community health. One way to understand these influences is to begin asking new questions about public and population health strategies:

**Conventional question:** How can we promote healthy behavior and reduce the differences in the distribution of disease and illness?

- **Health equity question:** How can we influence conditions that make it difficult for people to live healthy lives (i.e., food security, land use and transportation policies, access to recreation)?
- **Health equity question:** How can we promote more equitable social and economic conditions that are known to improve population health outcomes?
- **Health equity question:** What kinds of community organizing and alliance building are necessary to protect communities?
- **Health equity question:** How can we better address the needs of vulnerable populations?

*Discussion Questions adapted from “Unnatural Causes Action Toolkit”*

## **Resources**

### **Vancouver Coastal Health Population Health Team**

The VCH Population Health Team facilitates access to information such as population health data and policy alternatives and helps groups work through the development of population health strategies.

### **Vancouver Coastal Health – Health Inequities Educational Kit**

- **Power Point Presentation – Population Health**

This presentation provides an overview of the definition of population health, as well as current relevant initiatives and commentary on population health issues. Population health data is identified for local communities as appropriate.

- **Educational Video - Population Health: The New Agenda (Running Time: 15 mins)**

This video resource is an exploration of the differences in health status associated with measures such as income, education and neighbourhood. The video features commentary from Vancouver Coastal Health staff and stories from North Shore residents about how the social determinants of health impact their lives. The video is available online at:

[www.lemongrassmedia.net/lgm/blog/files/pophealth-the-new-agenda.html](http://www.lemongrassmedia.net/lgm/blog/files/pophealth-the-new-agenda.html)

### **Vancouver Coastal Health Population Health Website**

The website provides an overview of population health approaches and a full library of reports, initiatives and resources. [www.vch.ca/population](http://www.vch.ca/population)

### **Vancouver Coastal Health Population Health Framework**

Endorsed by Senior Leadership, the Framework identifies four strategic areas for population health initiatives: Leadership, Partnership, Advocacy and Policy Development.

[www.vch.ca/professionals/docs/population\\_health\\_approach.pdf](http://www.vch.ca/professionals/docs/population_health_approach.pdf)

### **Vancouver Coastal Health - Population Health Report**

The purpose of this report is to facilitate an understanding of what determines the health of our populations through the presentation of population health data; to identify and describe current priority areas for VCH population health activities; and, to describe policy options for improving the health of our populations. The report is available at:

[www.vch.ca/population/docs/VCH\\_PopulationHealthReport.pdf](http://www.vch.ca/population/docs/VCH_PopulationHealthReport.pdf)

## **Vancouver Coastal Health Advocacy Tools**

- **Vancouver Coastal Health Advocacy Framework**  
Endorsed by Senior Leadership, the Framework outlines guiding principles and resources for undertaking advocacy in VCH, as well as a tool for identifying advocacy topics and actions.  
[www.vch.ca/public/docs/advocacy/VCH\\_Advocacy\\_Public.pdf](http://www.vch.ca/public/docs/advocacy/VCH_Advocacy_Public.pdf)
- **Vancouver Coastal Health Population Health Advocacy Workshop**  
Advocacy Workshops are an opportunity to learn about advocacy principles and current advocacy initiatives in VCH. Participants work through an activity that has them identifying potential advocacy activities. Guest speakers are often brought in to provide perspectives on undertaking advocacy within an organizational setting.

## **Audiences**

1. Health Service Leaders and Programs
2. Community Opinion Leaders
3. Policy Decision Makers
4. Population Health Wellness Networks and Partners

## **Feedback Form**

Population Health Inequities Presentation Toolkit: Feedback Form
Name of organization or group:
How many participants:
Purpose of presentation:
Please note any follow-up actions that resulted:
Please note any requested resources or information:

Please return to:

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