



Canada — Getting Healthier, One Canadian at a Time Why Canadians must take more responsibility for their health

Presented by the Canadian Council on Integrated Healthcare, June 2009

A healthy population is the cornerstone of a healthy country. But what is the responsibility of *individual* Canadians to maintain and improve their own health? And what steps should we be taking — individually and collectively — to foster and promote better health?

Recent years have seen considerable focus on challenges and changes to the Canadian healthcare system and its impact on Canadians' health. But despite this momentum for change, the healthcare system still focuses overwhelmingly on caring for the sick, not on preventing people from becoming sick.

Our healthcare system is too expensive to maintain. Individual responsibility is the key to building a sustainable healthcare system that promotes good health for all Canadians.

At its June 2009 session in Montréal, the Canadian Council on Integrated Healthcare (CCIH) discussed the issue of Canadians' responsibility for their own health. This is a rich and complex topic, and one that can be tackled from a wide variety of perspectives. The Council considered issues such as:

- how the terms we use make a difference: healthcare vs. sick care; responsibility vs. entitlement
- the benefit of a multi-jurisdictional, multi-departmental approach (for example, combining efforts from departments of health, environment and finance)
- accountability and incentives
- health policy and its relation to individual habits
- the pivotal role of other players, like employers and local communities
- the economics of Canadians taking responsibility for their health

We need to engage individuals, employers and government about individuals taking responsibility for their own health — now.

Engaging individuals

“My health is mine to lose.”

Why is it important for Canadians to take more responsibility for their health?

- Everyone wants to live longer and enjoy a better quality of life.
- We can't expect others to make health choices for us.

- A population made up of healthy individuals reduces the cost of health services paid by taxes, paid as part of workplace compensation or paid out of pocket.

What actions can individual Canadians take?

- The first and most important step is to focus on the things you can control: diet, exercise, smoking, drugs, alcohol and complying with treatment plans.
- Know your family's health risks and status, and take responsibility to get screened.
- Advocate on your own behalf and make wise health choices.
- Ask your employer to make healthy choices easier to make while at work (e.g., access to exercise and healthy food).
- Integrate health into your daily life by first taking small steps and focusing on simple approaches, then developing a strong, healthy lifestyle.

Engaging employers

“Improving employee health has a positive return on investment.”

Why is it important for employers to help employees take control of their own health?

- Healthy employees are more productive and cost benefit plans less.
- Focusing on employee health increases workplace loyalty and makes it easier to attract and retain the best employees.
- Personal accountability is part of successful workplace cultures — employee health is a natural fit.

What actions can employers take?

- Institute individual development plans that focus on health as area of growth and accountability.
- Design benefit plans that increase individual accountability.
- Create an environment that encourages healthy choices (e.g., healthy cafeteria meals, subsidized gym memberships).

Engaging governments

“Improving individual health is the key to sustainable healthcare.”

Why is it important for governments to help individuals take control of their own health?

- Improving individual health is key to a sustainable healthcare system.
- A healthy population means reduced long-term healthcare costs.
- A system with healthier people can focus scarce resources on those most in need and allow government to deliver on its healthcare promises.

What actions can governments take?

- Break down interdepartmental silos, especially between health, environment and urban planning.
- Create powerful ministries of health promotion.
- Set clearly defined and measurable goals of individual health.
- Adopt best practices from other jurisdictions and countries.

- Expand the idea of sin taxes to cover poor diet choices.

Next steps

The CCIH identified a series of possible research areas that are now being refined to support the search for solutions. Possible research areas include:

- identifying the cost of doing nothing to promote individual health
- identifying the resources at all levels dedicated to health promotion
- quantifying the return on investment for spending on health promotion
- identifying best practices across Canada and in other countries
- defining how public opinion has informed policy to date
- developing a healthcare spending ratio that mandates dedicating a growing percentage of the overall healthcare budget to health promotion

Sign up for the next CCIH paper

The CCIH will release a paper on Canadians' responsibility for the health later in 2009. To receive a copy, please Ginette David (Ginette.David@sanofi-aventis.com) and ask to be added to the CCIH distribution list.

The Canadian Council on Integrated Healthcare

The Canadian Council on Integrated Healthcare is an independent, non-aligned think-tank whose mandate is to influence and catalyze change and to build bridges between sectors in the healthcare system. Founded in 1997, we are dedicated to helping Canadians understand emerging health issues.

Our vision is for an integrated healthcare system that balances quality, access and cost and that creates better health for all Canadians. Our membership includes key opinion leaders from the private health sector, consumer groups and health professions. The activities of the CCIH are funded through an arm's-length, unrestricted educational grant from sanofi-aventis. The CCIH also acknowledges the support it receives in time and assistance from its members and their employers.

Media contacts:

Marilee Mark, Chair
Canadian Council on Integrated Healthcare
519-594-5917
Marilee_Mark@manulife.com

John Elliott, Communications Chair
Canadian Council on Integrated Healthcare
905-841-1124
John.Elliott@sanofi-aventis.com

For further information, please contact us at info@ccih.ca or visit www.ccih.ca