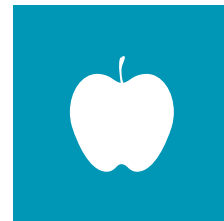
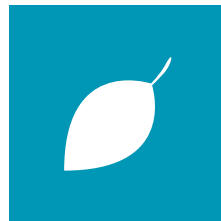
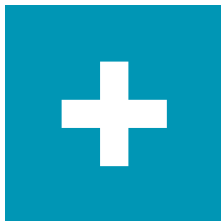


LEARNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



2011 What's Worth Knowing:
Health & the Environment Symposium

Executive Summary
February 2012



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Current health care spending rates are affecting the sustainability of our healthcare system and putting financial pressure on other areas of governmental responsibility, especially education. Yet education plays a key role in helping citizens to lead healthier lives, thereby restraining health care costs. Education not only secures positive health outcomes by influencing lifestyle choices and understanding health issues, it also creates awareness of the poorly understood links between environment and health. Furthermore, education enhances employment and income both of which are positively correlated with good health. Clarifying the relationship between health, education and the environment was the motivation behind the What's Worth Knowing: Health and the Environment Symposium hosted by Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF) in November 2011.

The Symposium gathered senior decision makers from government, industry, research, education and health sectors to develop sustainability education oriented policy recommendations that would enhance the overall health and wellbeing of Canadians. Recommendations were developed in facilitated sessions that drew on sector specific expertise. Participants began broadly with a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the existing health care system in Canada. This broad exercise served as a gateway towards in-depth analytical conversations about health, the environment and education. The next session involved breaking down the Symposium's key themes - social determinants of health, air quality, food, technology, nature & physical activity and toxins - with the goal of identifying critical information and target audi-

ences, especially governmental decision makers, parents, consumers, educators and the media. The final session of the day served as a 'call to action' where participants generated practical and informed policy recommendations that emphasized the link between health, education and the environment. Details about the specific recommendations are captured in a table on page 5.

The sessions were energized by presentations from Don Drummond (Matthews Fellow and Distinguished Visiting Scholar in the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University); Dr. Gerald Farthing (Deputy Minister, Manitoba Education); Dr. Arlene King (Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care); Bruce Lourie (President of the Ivey Foundation and best selling author of *Slow Death by Rubber Duck: How the Toxic Chemistry of Everyday Life Affects Our Health*), Diana MacKay (Director of Education, Health and Immigration Programs at the Conference Board of Canada); Eli Bamfo (Environmental Health & Safety Specialist, Chartwells a Division of Compass Group Canada) and Dr. Harvey Skinner (Dean of the Faculty of Health at York University).

Symposium speakers identified the roots of the current unsustainable conditions in which the health care system is operating. Each presentation explored ways participants could promote the healthy citizen ideal in their respective sectors and communities. Exemplifying this ideal involves encouraging a connection to nature, making informed consumer choices and adopting a preventative approach to health.

Public Health & Learning: It Is Everybody's Business

The recent rise in health issues such as asthma, obesity and heart disease, particularly in low-income communities has been produced in large part from social conditions within the built environment. This circumstance indicates that positive health outcomes are heavily influenced by where and how citizens live.

The Canadian Institute for Health Information found that Canada spent an estimated \$191.6 billion on health care in 2010 - up \$9.5 billion from the previous year.¹ The recent explosion in healthcare costs is attributed to many factors including an aging population, new and expensive treatments, demanding consumer-patients and an increase in preventable, chronic illnesses. The gradual rate of growth for these items has made it easy to avoid making difficult, long-term decisions to stem growth.² However, merely increasing spending on healthcare alone does not translate into better health outcomes.

Investing in the long-term wellbeing of citizens through education can effectively reduce health care costs in the long run. Governments have a tendency to avoid investing heavily in early childhood development programs in spite of the broad and long lasting benefits. Similarly, addressing environmental health concerns will take years to show results, however the benefits will last generations. Emphasizing a comprehensive approach to health promotion has a cascading effect that improves awareness and knowledge in the general

population. Given the important connections between health, education, responsible citizenship and quality of life, educating about health as early as possible is imperative to ensuring sustainable implementation of programs.

Participants in the What's Worth Knowing: Health and the Environment Symposium viewed health and education as intrinsically linked. Changing societal expectations about wellness and the environment through formal (classroom-based learning from pre-kindergarten to post secondary), non-formal (workplace training and professional development) and informal (public awareness) education was deemed critical to altering the demand and need for healthcare. Symposium participants emphasized the importance of integrated, community specific policies that address knowledge gaps and provide tools for more effective health and environment literacy.

Sustainability in Canadian healthcare is less about 'fixing' a broken system and more about a collaborative, inter-sectoral response to the "ongoing deterioration in the economic and social conditions that promote health".³ It is about shifting the emphasis from an end-of-the-pipe focus on illness to a broader and more inclusive perspective on health and well-being. As the recommendations presented in this document indicate, emphasis on prevention and consideration of the social, physical, natural and organizational environment has never been more critical. Prevention must include addressing the root causes of health problems created by the release of toxins into the environment, including those from consumer products

developed in the name of "cleaner, whiter, and safer" choices.

Viewing health issues through a sustainability lens ensures attention to the interconnections among the related economic, environmental and social issues. This approach also considers long range implications of alternative policy choices. Much of Canada's health discourse, which is premised on short-term responses to health concerns, ignores the bigger picture of sustainability challenges (Conference Board of Canada, 2011). Social determinants of health play a major role in this circumstance given that income, education and physical environment are factors that increase vulnerability to poor health outcomes. Examining the problems of health care through a sustainability lens provides a fresh perspective that yields creative ways of achieving the long-term health and wellbeing of all Canadians.

¹ Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2010). National health expenditure trends, 1975-2010. Available: <https://secure.cihi.ca/estore/productFamily.htm?locale=en&pf=PFC1556&lang=en&media=0>

² Stuart, N. & Adams, J. (2007). "The Sustainability of Canada's Healthcare System: A Framework for Advancing the Debate." *Healthcare Quarterly*. 10(2): 96-103.

³ Black, E. & MacKinnon, S. (2011). Sustainable health care begins with the social determinants of health: It's time to get it right. Available: <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2011/06/Conference%20Board%20June%202011.pdf>

RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTOR	RECOMMENDATION
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase safety regulation and standard setting • Get information about toxic substances to the public • Shift to prevention/proactive regulation for promotion of healthy environments • Ensure housing policies support access to groceries, safe parks and walking • Consider adequacy of the built environment as a basic human rights issue • Draft regulations that ensure safe and appropriate use of technology • Foster consumer knowledge through labeling and broad transmission of knowledge
Non-Governmental Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take on a think tank role to set strategic direction, identify gaps and barriers • Identify and apply best practices • Mobilize public support and awareness – organize and create dialogue, facilitate discussion, provide leadership • Focus on changing and developing policy and practice • Collaborate with industry around sustainability
Industry/Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in employee health – inform direction for workplace programs through surveys that investigate lifestyle health issues, invest in LEED certified buildings, extend volunteering to employee’s families • Measure success beyond financial metrics • “Act like a part of the community” by balancing commitment to community with the drive to make a profit. • Take an active lead in the community, building partnerships and accountability, move beyond monetary donations • Develop a culture of business ethics to guide decision making about what a company will and will not do • Appoint resources with the organization to implement change such as designated sustainability personnel • “Walk the talk” personally, model ‘healthy citizen’ behaviour
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for information exchange – peer to peer discussions that emphasize collaborative information exchanges. • Lead by example with selective use and consumption of cell phones, Wi-Fi, cosmetics • Build awareness across many communities, serving as a place where emerging issues can first be identified • Gain a sense of what’s important and inform the government • Serve as a learning laboratory for how we understand and approach issues

SECTOR	RECOMMENDATION
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate more practitioners who can spend sufficient time on behaviour change in patients (e.g. nurses, naturopathic doctors, social workers, midwives, dietitians, social workers) • Fund more counseling of positive health habits, rather than care of ill health • Make health care practitioners more focused on environmental impact behaviour • Provide more professional development on environmental health issues • Modify health education to provide a greater focus on the whole person (patient-centred care) • Have more preventative health care providers in primary and secondary schools (e.g. school nurses, health promoters)
Post-Secondary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote health and sustainability learning in interdisciplinary teams • Ensure curriculum promotes critical thinking re: environmental change • Model well being and sustainability as an institution • Ensure that reality matches rhetoric • Find out what exemplary models exist and use them • Ensure that credentialing bodies adopt a ‘big picture’ perspective • Make a much greater connection between research and policy development • Consider student “sustainability pledges” upon graduation
Education (K-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get kids outside and connected to their health • Approach literacy and numeracy in the context of health, wellness and sustainability. Health and sustainability are fundamental to all curricula, they are not exclusive topics • Give teachers time to process and communicate interdisciplinary connections • Adopt a province-wide approach • Provide only healthy options in cafeterias (note that profitability is only affected in the short turn) • Engage students in all discussions and actions affecting their wellness. Senior students have far greater impact on younger students – have them on wellness committees in schools as student mentors • Reduce toxins in the school environment (indoors and outdoors) • Provide funding for preventative measures, especially in First Nations schools
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go directly to reporters on key issues • Provide training on how to understand systems and science behind the issues • Provide contact list of credible sources of information • Build relationship with reporters • Utilize partnerships to develop positive health promotion/prevention education • Know the different audiences and how they absorb media



2011 What's Worth Knowing: Health and the Environment Symposium



Copyright © 2012 Learning for a Sustainable Future

Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF) is a registered Canadian charitable organization. Since 1991, LSF has partnered with business, governments, school boards, universities, educators, youth and communities across Canada to advance education policies and practices for engaged, responsible citizenship for the 21st century.

Learning for a Sustainable Future

343 York Lanes, York University
4700 Keele Street
North York, ON M3J 1P3
TEL: 416-327-2032
EMAIL: info@lsf-lst.ca | WEB: www.lsf-lst.ca

Written and researched by Sabreena Delhon.

DESIGNED BY ANITA SEKHARAN