

THE HEALTH PROMOTION ALIGNMENT FRAMEWORK

A Strategic Blueprint for the Health of Canadians



***Communications
Reference Guide***

Use & attribution

This document is intended to support intergovernmental dialogue, mandate development, and strategic implementation of upstream health promotion across Canada. It is part of a broader suite of policy and communications tools developed to strengthen federal leadership in population health promotion, and builds on the White Paper The Health Promotion Alignment Framework: A Strategic Blueprint for the Health of Canadians, which provides the foundational policy rationale and evidence base.

All related materials are offered without conditions for non-commercial use and may be shared, adapted, or reproduced, whether in whole or in part, for internal government, policy, or planning purposes, with attribution. For any other use, including commercial use, reproduction or distribution, please contact the author. All content remains the intellectual property of the author.

All documents from the suite are available electronically for viewing or downloading by scanning the QR code below.



Marc Dupont is a senior health policy expert with over three decades of experience in government, public administration, and consulting. He has played key roles in shaping major federal health initiatives, including Canada's response to the United Nations Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the Integrated Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy, and federal-provincial-territorial consultations for the Public Health Goals for Canada. He has appeared as an expert witness before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health (HESA) and contributed to the National Consensus Conference for the Mental Health Commission of Canada as a symposium moderator. His career includes executive roles at the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), serving as CEO of a health policy consulting firm, and teaching as faculty at the Canada School of Public Service. He can be reached at www.lacmeechstrategies.com

PURPOSE

This guide provides strategic communications support to help policy and communications teams frame and communicate health promotion as a core policy priority across economic, health, and social agendas.

It complements the Canada Health Promotion Action Plan, the Policy Brief, and the White Paper by offering framing tools, talking points, and language guidance, public statements, debate prep, and stakeholder engagement.

STRATEGIC POSITIONING

A New Frame for Health Promotion

Health promotion is often misunderstood as a sideline policy, focused on behavior change or public awareness campaigns. The Health Promotion Alignment Framework and the Canada Health Promotion Action Plan reframes it as:

- A national strategy.
- A cross-cutting economic and social lever.
- A pragmatic tool to reduce pressure on healthcare systems while improving long-term population outcomes.

Most Canadians still equate health with access to medical services. As something achieved by treating illness after it appears. But health is not defined by the absence of disease. It's a resource we draw on every day, shaped long before we show up in a clinic. The Framework reclaims this broader understanding. It positions health promotion not just as an individual responsibility or peripheral policy stream, but as structural, shared work that requires action across sectors.

It is not an add-on. It is not "nice-to-have." It is a nation-building investment, not just a health imperative, but a fiscal, demographic, and intergovernmental one.

BALANCING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FRAMING

Health promotion supports productivity, fiscal sustainability, and long-term economic strength, but it must be framed carefully. Over-indexing on economic arguments risks triggering concerns that government is treating Canadians as economic units. Strong messaging reaffirms that health is a public good, its value is not only instrumental, it's intrinsic. Effective messaging balances:

- Economic strength: workforce productivity, healthcare cost containment.
- Equity and quality of life: healthy childhoods, secure aging, stronger communities.
- Governance legitimacy: federal leadership that respects jurisdiction and supports provinces.

CLARIFYING THE ROLE OF BEHAVIOUR

Health promotion has long been conflated with personal responsibility: “eat better, move more.” But that’s not how real health outcomes are produced. Individual choices still matter, but they are shaped by systems: income, housing, safety, education, community cohesion. Health is not merely the absence of disease, or the result of self-discipline, it is a shared societal outcome.

Messaging should reinforce:

- The Framework does not “blame the individual.”
- It targets environments that make healthy choices possible and sustainable.
- It identifies measurable positive outcomes, like emotional resilience, income stability, and school readiness, not just disease prevention.

CLARIFYING THE FEDERAL ROLE

This is not about shifting funding away from health care delivery or adding new conditions to transfers. It is about aligning efforts upstream to reduce system strain downstream.

The federal role is:

- Facilitator of shared outcomes.
- Enabler of cross-sector coordination.
- Investor in data modernization and capacity building.

Messaging must emphasize:

- This is a complement, not a competitor, to existing systems.
- The federal role respects P/T jurisdiction while supporting whole-of-government coherence.
- Provinces retain implementation flexibility; the Framework aligns goals, not processes.

USE CASES AND SCENARIOS

Use this guide when:

- Crafting presentations and preparing briefings.
- Engaging governments, civil society, advocates, or sector stakeholders.
- Responding to critiques.
- Coordinating interdepartmental work or governance briefings.

A short set of ready-to-use framing lines and metaphors is provided in the Appendix. These can be integrated into speeches, public engagement, and media appearances with no added lift. Each line reinforces the strategic value of health promotion as a national priority, balancing economic, social, and jurisdictional narratives to speak across audiences and policy priorities. At the same time, the framing remains flexible and accessible, ready for use in public settings, media engagement, or internal policy conversations.

CORE MESSAGING PILLARS

Pillar	Messaging Focus
Health is a Public Good	The value of health is intrinsic, not just a means to economic ends.
Prevention ≠ Personal Responsibility	Health is structurally enabled, not morally earned.
Economic + Equity Framing	Healthier populations are more equitable and more productive.
Complement, Not Compete	This strengthens healthcare, it doesn't siphon from it.
Alignment, Not Control	Federal role is respectful, facilitative, enabling, and jurisdiction-sensitive.
Cross-Sector Leverage	Health outcomes emerge from housing, education, income, early childhood, to name but some of the broad social determinants of health sectors.
Lifecourse Lens	Health evolves over a lifetime. Real resilience requires sustained opportunities to build, maintain, and restore well-being at every stage, not just early in life or once illness strikes.
Shared Language = Shared Success	Common goals, measurable outcomes, transparent progress.



APPENDIX STRATEGIC MESSAGING

For use in speeches, public engagement, media interviews, and stakeholder communications, internal briefing notes and policy conversations.

Reframing the health narrative

“We can keep building more hospitals and expanding physician services, but unless we stop the bodies from floating down the river, we’ll never get ahead. Health promotion isn’t about replacing illness-focused service delivery and medical care, it’s about reducing the demand for it in the first place.”

“Health promotion is not a sideline issue. It’s not just about eating better or exercising more. It’s about building the physical, social, and economic conditions that allow Canadians to thrive.”

“This isn’t about telling people what to eat or how to live. It’s about ensuring that where you live, learn, work, and age supports your ability to stay healthy.”

Economic resilience and workforce

“A stronger economy starts with healthier Canadians. Health promotion boosts productivity, reduces long-term disability costs, and strengthens workforce participation.”

“This isn’t a luxury add-on. It’s national risk management. A resilient economy depends on a population healthy enough to weather shocks. Not just respond to them.”

“Investing in Canadians *is* investing in Canada. Healthier people build stronger communities, a more competitive workforce, and a more resilient economy.”

Strategic coordination and national unity

“Every province is pulling hard, but in different directions. The Health Promotion Alignment Framework gets us pulling in the same direction: united against preventable illness, not divided by inefficiency.”

“This is not about more federal control. It’s about smarter federal coordination, bringing provinces, sectors, and communities together to build lasting results.”

“We’re not proposing a new program. We’re proposing a national strategy. One that respects jurisdiction, maximizes what’s already working, and aligns efforts across the country.”

Moral and social Imperative

“Health promotion isn’t just an economic necessity, it’s a moral obligation. Canadians deserve to live full, healthy lives, not just get patched up when things go wrong.”

“A healthier Canada is a more equitable Canada. This strategy doesn’t just lower costs, it lifts people.”

Government leadership and public accountability

“The federal government has a responsibility to lead where it can add value. By strengthening health outcomes and economic resilience without creating jurisdictional friction or proposing costly system overhauls.”

“While others debate system expansion or retrenchment, this strategy focuses on results: aligning existing efforts, maximizing impact, and supporting provinces through smart, flexible coordination.”

“Health promotion is not a soft policy. It’s a nation-building investment. One that improves lives, reduces costs, and strengthens our shared capacity to respond to future challenges.”

“The health crisis isn’t coming, it’s here. What’s missing isn’t data or diagnosis. What’s missing is coordinated leadership.”

Lifecourse lens and intergenerational equity

“Real resilience isn’t built in emergency rooms, it’s built across a lifetime. Health promotion ensures every stage of life is supported, not just the early years or the final chapter.”