

THE HEALTH PROMOTION ALIGNMENT FRAMEWORK

A Strategic Blueprint for the Health of Canadians



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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.

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POLICY CHALLENGE

A reactive, costly and unsustainable model

Canada's health system remains locked in a reactive spending cycle—funneling billions into medical services while underinvesting in strategies that keep people healthier for longer. This approach increases costs, strains provincial and territorial budgets, and fails to improve long-term health outcomes.

Despite significant investment, Canadians are spending more years in poor health, driving up demand for medical services and long-term care. Without a shift toward proactive health strategies, these pressures will continue to grow, reducing fiscal sustainability, limiting workforce participation, and increasing economic strain.

A policy framework that strengthens health promotion and prevention is essential to easing long-term pressures on the healthcare system and ensuring a sustainable path forward.



WHY THIS MATTERS

Health Promotion: A core pillar of economic resilience

Canada's healthcare system remains focused on treating illness rather than preventing it. Without a strategic shift toward proactive health promotion, rising chronic disease rates, workforce challenges, and fiscal pressures will continue to grow.

Health promotion is not simply about disease prevention, nor is it limited to a narrow definition of a physical end state. It focuses on broad social determinants of health, including income, education, and community environments—key factors that also influence economic stability and workforce participation. It is a strategic necessity that shapes fiscal policy, economic productivity, and the sustainability of public services. Addressing inefficiencies—such as siloed provincial initiatives, misaligned incentives, and reactive spending—will be critical to ensuring long-term resilience of Canada's highly interrelated health and economic systems.

While pandemic preparedness (a form of secondary disease prevention) has improved, Canada still lacks a sustained, strategic approach to health promotion. The next crisis—whether another outbreak, an economic downturn, or a workforce disruption—will hit just as hard if we do not change course. A resilient economy depends on a population healthy enough to withstand these shocks—not just respond to them after they arrive.

A healthier population supports economic growth, sustains government services, and ensures long-term fiscal sustainability. Without a structured framework, governments will remain trapped in crisis-driven decision-making, where reactive spending continues to outpace solutions.

Inefficiencies, misaligned incentives and lack of data

Canada's health expenditures remain overwhelmingly reactive, with the majority of spending still directed toward treating chronic diseases and hospital-based interventions. But even well-designed system reforms won't succeed if policy incentives remain misaligned. Current funding models prioritize the volume of medical services provided rather than measurable improvements in population health, reinforcing a reactive rather than preventive approach.

We cannot improve what we do not measure. Canada's health information systems still prioritize tracking disease burden, often using hospital discharge data or immunization rates, rather than measuring positive health outcomes, such as those identified in the *Framework* proposed below. Without this shift, funding priorities will continue to emphasize reactive care over proactive investment in population health outcomes.

A window for renewed F/P/T collaboration

Historically, provinces have maintained autonomy over health spending while navigating federal funding agreements. However, a window of opportunity has opened to approach this differently. Every province is struggling under the same systemic pressures: rising medical system costs, aging populations, and a workforce that is not only in shortage but also poorly planned, recruited, trained and managed, and insufficiently structured around multidisciplinary teams that could improve efficiency and care delivery.

If framed strategically, a collaborative commitment to health promotion need not trigger F/P/T jurisdictional posturing. The challenge lies not in the mechanism but in achieving alignment around a shared vision. With the right approach, collaboration can be achieved without overstepping provincial and territorial autonomy. There is an opportunity to act while momentum for health system improvements remains high.

Without a strategic, pan-Canadian approach to health promotion, inefficiencies will persist—worsening fiscal burdens, straining workforce productivity, driving up long-term disability costs, and deepening regional disparities in economic resilience.

Public perception reinforces the status quo

Public understanding of health promotion remains limited, often reinforcing the status quo. Many Canadians still equate emergency hospital access, acute care, screening, and medical treatment services with 'healthcare,' driving demand for reactive treatments. But the old adage remains true: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

While some forms of secondary healthcare disease prevention—such as vaccines and screenings—have gained acceptance (though even this perception continues to evolve), the public's understanding of true upstream health promotion remains vague. Canada must ensure that policies and strategies proactively creating the conditions for health and overall well-being—separate from and preceding illness—are better understood. Many countries have integrated

health promotion more systematically, demonstrating models that reduce system strain and improve long-term outcomes. Canada has an opportunity to build on its own strong foundations to advance a more cohesive approach.

Expanding public awareness of health promotion can help reinforce its role, not just in preventing illness but in fostering overall well-being. Framing health promotion policy as a strategy to reduce system strain, improve quality of life, and ensure long-term sustainability can help drive this shift.

FROM GLOBAL LEADER TO FALLING BEHIND

A call to reclaim our position

Canada has a strong legacy in health promotion and an opportunity to reclaim global leadership in this space.

- The 1974 Lalonde Report *New Perspectives on the Health of Canadians*, redefined our understanding of health itself, despite the entrenchment of our medical model not responding accordingly.
- The WHO's *Health for All* declaration, the *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*, and Canada's own *Achieving Health for All: A Framework for Health Promotion* framework cemented Canada as a global leader—yet ironically, these landmark documents helped shape international systems changes far more than Canadian domestic action.

Despite shaping global health policy, Canada has failed to sustain its leadership at home. By advancing a strategic, coordinated approach, Canada can reaffirm its leadership in health promotion.

POLICY SOLUTION

The Health Promotion Alignment Framework

The Health Promotion Alignment Framework offers a structured, evidence-based model for a sustainable, coordinated, and outcome-driven approach to health promotion in Canada. Rather than operating in silos, this model aligns pan-Canadian health objectives with broader social, economic, and fiscal priorities to maximize impact. The Framework:

- Links health, education, social policy, and economic planning as part of a more comprehensive strategy.
- Strengthens efficiency by aligning federal and provincial/territorial efforts, reducing duplication, and maximizing resources without increasing costs.
- Improves long-term fiscal sustainability by investing in proactive health strategies that complement—not compete with—medical service delivery.

- Reframes success by tracking positive health indicators, ensuring Canada begins measuring what it aims to achieve—Healthy Canadians. Not merely indicators of illness.
- Engages contributor domains: individuals, families, schools, communities, civil societies and NGOs, workplaces, media, businesses, the medical system, and various levels of government.

A detailed White Paper provides the full policy rationale, core principles, and components of the Framework, outlining evidence-based strategies for cross-sector collaboration, measurable health outcomes, and a structured blueprint for policy and program implementation.

These strategic directions are further expanded in the Canada Health Promotion Action Plan, which translates the Framework into actionable federal pathways, appendices on implementation, and measurable indicators.

The Framework's core logic chain—how contributor domains (sectors) implement → evidence-based strategies that target → key influencing factors to support the achievement of → positive health outcomes over the life course—is clearly explained and visualized in a suite of supporting materials, including a White Paper, an Action Plan, and a schematic illustration of the Framework. These documents are available upon request for briefing or implementation purposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From policy to action

The following recommendations outline concrete steps to operationalize The Health Promotion Alignment Framework, ensuring alignment between policy, funding, and measurable health outcomes.

Implement a coordinated, pan-Canadian health promotion strategy

- Operationalize the Canada Health Promotion Action Plan guided by the Health Promotion Alignment Framework as foundational tools to guide structured, measurable, and jurisdiction-sensitive implementation.
- Establish a sustained federal commitment to upstream health promotion, using existing levers to support F/P/T flexibility and alignment.

Enhance efficiency and fiscal sustainability

- Strengthen F/P/T coordination to align funding and programs while reducing duplication.
- Foster cross-sector collaboration to ensure private sector, civil society, and local governments contribute to a cohesive health promotion ecosystem.
- Prioritize health promotion investments that deliver measurable long-term benefits while optimizing existing resources.

Fund strategic health promotion initiatives

- Invest in evidence-based strategies proven to reduce chronic disease burdens over time.
- Support community-led health initiatives through strategic investment models that maximize impact without increasing P/T financial burdens.

Strengthen public awareness and media framing

- Position health promotion as a pillar of nation-building by reinforcing its role in long-term economic and social resilience.
- Frame proactive health investments as a fiscally responsible, high-return strategy.
- Reinforce that investing in health promotion complements—not replaces—needed improvements to the medical ‘healthcare’ system, ensuring that Canadians continue to have access to quality medical care while also reducing preventable chronic illness and easing pressure on hospitals and providers.

A STRATEGIC POLICY OPPORTUNITY

Strengthening Canada’s Health & Economic Resilience

Federal leadership has a key opportunity to champion health promotion as a strategic investment in both Canadians’ wellbeing and national economic resilience. A healthier population strengthens workforce participation, reduces long-term budgetary strain, and enhances productivity—positioning Canada for sustainable economic growth. This is nation-building and demonstrates:

- A fiscally responsible shift that restores Canada’s leadership in health promotion and maximizes resources to strengthen economic sustainability.
- A coordinated approach that strengthens F/P/T collaboration while respecting jurisdictional autonomy.
- Beyond its fiscal and workforce benefits, a healthier, more equitable society—one where all Canadians, regardless of income or geography, can achieve their full potential.

The time for action is now. Without leadership, Canada will remain reactive. The Health Promotion Alignment Framework provides a clear path to improving the health of Canadians, strengthening economic resilience, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of our healthcare systems.