

# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND A VOICE FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

CHB Accomplishments  
2018/19 to 2022/23



**Community  
Health Boards**

*Community Partnerships and a Voice for a Healthier Future*

# Community Health Boards

Community Health Boards (CHBs) are committed groups of volunteers who work together to improve the health of communities. There are 37 CHBs across Nova Scotia. CHBs serve a vital role in the well-being of their communities, helping to support many community-based health promotion projects and partnerships. This includes providing grants to community-based groups to support projects focused on health promotion and the social determinants of health[1].

The role and duties of CHBs are described in Nova Scotia's Health Authorities Act. They consult communities about health issues related to the social determinants of health, develop community health plans that include priorities for action, and advise Nova Scotia Health about local health issues and concerns.

In addition, CHBs provide grassroots leadership on local health and wellness by partnering with other groups and organizations. They provide a local voice by highlighting local health priorities and by advocating to all three levels of government. CHBs promote health and wellness by providing direct financial support for community-based projects.

*[1] The social determinants of health are all the factors that affect a person's and a community's health. Health care is just one of many social determinants of health. Others are race, gender, income, education, employment, and many others. For more information visit the Public Health Agency of Canada website and search for 'social determinants of health.'*



# Community Health Plans

CHBs work together to identify regional and provincial priorities, as well as specific local issues. Through relationship-building and by developing inclusive, connected communities, all 37 CHBs work together on these priorities:



## Supportive environments providing equitable and affordable access to:

- Health and wellness services and information
- Recreation opportunities and spaces
- Secure food and food literacy
- Safe and appropriate housing



## Mental wellness and sense of community belonging



## Poverty reduction and prosperous communities

## Community Health Planning

The priorities, developed from the community health plans created since 2018-19, have guided CHB work and the advice they provide to Nova Scotia Health. In 2023/24, CHBs will be renewing their community health plans. This process includes reviewing local health data from Statistics Canada and other sources, consulting communities about issues and priorities, developing new priorities for action in partnership with Nova Scotia Health, community-based organizations and other stakeholders. The new community health plans will become the foundation for the CHBs' work for the next five years.



# Action on Community Health Plan Priorities

Each CHB has a local action plan for addressing the community health plan priorities. Their projects and activities over the five-year life of their plan are too many to list for all 37 CHBs province-wide but here are some examples of CHB actions on the current health plan priorities:

Supportive environments providing equitable and affordable access to health and wellness services and information



Eastern Shore Musquodoboit CHB worked with Nova Scotia Health and other partners to develop a hub model for wellness and prevention supports. With grant funding from the Nova Scotia Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care, the *Well-Being HUBs* project established a network of health and social care providers along the Eastern Shore and Musquodoboit Valley who support community members and their care partners as they age and transition into Continuing Care and Long-Term Care (LTC). The network promotes and provides coordinated programming, education and supports, while working to fill gaps in service. The HUB offerings were developed by HUB members with community input, and the project is supported by a paid coordinator and navigator. This model is being tested and evaluated as a potential rural delivery model for a variety of services.

Supportive environments providing equitable and affordable access to secure food and food literacy

The four Community Health Boards in Kings County worked together on a committee to advocate for a *healthy eating environment policy* by the Municipality of the County of Kings. There was support/partnership from Public Health and municipal staff. CHB members had one-on-one conversations with each councilor and provided a background information package before a presentation to the Council. Community champions also sent letters of support to Councilors. The council approved the policy in March 2020. Municipal staff are now working on implementing the policy.

Mental wellness and sense of community belonging



*Happy Chat Benches* are meant to reduce social isolation and increase social/community connection with citizens by encouraging conversation on community benches. The concept started in the UK. The Dartmouth Community Health Board partnered with municipal government to place explanatory signage on existing benches in Dartmouth to encourage conversation and promote social connection. An April 12, 2022 article in the Chronicle Herald profiled the 'Happy Chat Benches' project.

Supportive environments providing equitable and affordable access to recreation opportunities and spaces

The South Colchester Community Health Board hosted the *Winter Wellness Challenge and Community Picnic*, an online challenge to encourage mental and physical wellness for residents during the winter months in 2021. The community with the most participation in the challenge would win a community picnic. The CHB partnered with Colchester Recreation and jointly promoted the challenge, accepted entries and selected a winning community. The CHB with the local elementary school and community partners from the winning community to organize a community wide event. There were over 150 residents who enjoyed games, prizes, face painting, races, minute-to-win-it challenges and a free BBQ.

Supportive environments providing equitable and affordable access to safe and appropriate housing



*Antigonish Affordable Housing Society (AAHS) partnership* - Over the years the Antigonish Town and County CHB has partnered with the Antigonish Affordable Housing Society (AAHS) on several housing affordability projects. The society aims to break the cycle of poverty for vulnerable people, and improve quality of life through affordable, high quality and energy efficient community-supported housing. They also provide navigation support services, and facilitate community building among tenants. CHB collaboration with the AAHS has seen a CHB member participate on the society's Board of Directors, CHB participation in AAHS' Housing Matters Think Tank, and in the Build Together Project (Community Housing) of St FX University Extension department. The CHB has also supported several initiatives of AAHS with Wellness grant funds and other supports.

Poverty reduction and prosperous communities

Cape Breton University (CBU), in partnership with the Central Cape Breton CHB, hosted a conference entitled *Communities building hope: Action agenda to reduce poverty on Cape Breton Island*. With broader goals to educate and advocate as related to issues about poverty, the conference will bring together educators, grass-roots agencies working on poverty, community stakeholders and policy makers to begin what is hoped to be, a collaborative, problem-solving process. CBU's mission is to bolster the social and economic success of Cape Breton Island, and to be a champion for Cape Breton's prosperity. As prosperity cannot be achieved without addressing issues of poverty and income inequity CBU established a Working Group on Poverty, and is co-chaired by the chairperson of the Central Cape Breton CHB. The working group is creating a long-term, poverty reduction strategy that will harness the CBU's resources.



# Wellness Fund Grant Program

CHBs provide small, one-time grants to community groups and organizations who are developing projects related to local CHB health plan priorities. Each year, CHBs are provided funding for Wellness Fund grants. Grant applications are open in June and close in October. Each CHB reviews the grant applications and decides which ones to fund based on their priorities. Funds are awarded from December through March. Grant recipients have two years to complete their projects. The grants are not meant for ongoing operating funds for groups, and while groups may apply for funds each year, CHBs do not fund the same project or activity year after year.

For more information about Wellness Fund grants, go to the Wellness Fund page at [communityhealthboards.ns.ca](https://communityhealthboards.ns.ca)

## Wellness Funds: The numbers (2018-22)

- \$2.7 million provided to communities across Nova Scotia
- \$965,000 in community grants supported food security projects
- 1,200 grants provided to local groups and organizations
- \$5,000 is the maximum amount that can be awarded to a single WF applicant
- \$2,000 is the average value of individual grants awarded by CHBs



# Wellness Funds in Action

## Central zone

2SLGBTQ+ Pilot Project – The Southeastern CHB provided funding to the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning which supported the expansion of the Centre’s Gender & Sexuality Alliance (GSA) program by adding a suite of creative learning programs for 2SLGBTQ+ youth on a pilot program basis. This offering expands the Centre’s programming for this vulnerable community by increasing programming hours, and adding in-person and virtual GSA programs on topics related to sexuality and gender, as well as a closed space for QTBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Colour) gathering and community building.

Raising the Villages - Mawiomi W'jit Mijuwajijk - Gathering for our Children -- Raising the Villages received a Wellness grant from the Victoria County CHB to coordinate and provide support with participating communities to run the Welcoming Community Spaces Pilot Project across five locations in western Cape Breton. The goals are to improve collective health and shared prosperity, and to reduce the effects of social isolation, poverty, and early childhood vulnerability. Raising the Villages is a catalyst for communities that want to learn about the importance of the early years and to pilot a model that supports welcoming spaces for all citizens from the beginning of life.

## Eastern zone



## Northern zone

Health and Wellness Kit for Business – The Truro and Area CHB funded the Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce Health and Wellness Kit for Business. The project addressed entrepreneur and employee wellness. The Chamber hosted programs, specific to business, to help develop healthy workplace practices and promote activities such as healthy eating, stress, physical fitness, etc. The project created opportunities for businesses, managers, owners and staff to take part in wellness activities, educational events, and recognized businesses that were making efforts to improve employee wellness.

Jazer et apprendre -- The Clare CHB funded “Jazer et apprendre” (Discuss and Learn) by Radio Clare (Radio CIFA). This 10-week, hour-long radio series features different guest speakers weekly who discuss wellness activities and community groups who are working on wellness. Topics include nutrition, arts and culture, and even information about the work of the Clare CHB. The program reaches all of South West Nova, particularly Digby and Yarmouth counties - the largest Acadian region in the province. This allows the program to feature stories about activities and groups beyond the Clare CHB area.

## Western zone



# Working with Community Partners

CHBs often have the greatest impact on health issues because of their partnerships with other groups and organizations.

- CHBs across Nova Scotia worked with the Coalition for Healthy School Food and supported the *'Great Big Crunch'* – a national advocacy and awareness day in March. The work of this coalition lays the foundation for lifetime healthy eating habits through schools to ensure that learning is not hindered by a lack of access to healthy food.
- The Pictou West and Central & East Pictou CHBs, along with partners, started a Mental Wellness Working Group in Pictou County in June 2019. The working group was formed in response to conversations in the community about the growing need for mental health supports for Pictou County residents. The *Pictou County Mental Wellness Roundtable* evolved out of the working group. More than forty groups and organizations from across a variety of sectors attended the initial meeting in 2020. Membership has now grown to 65 community-based organizations and individuals. The Roundtable receives encouragement and financial support from the Aberdeen Health Foundation.



# Giving Voice to Local Health Issues: CHB Advocacy

Advocacy for health and wellness programs and healthy public policy is a key CHB function. CHBs advocate to improve community health, wellness, and on health equity issues. CHBs often play an important role by bringing citizens, community organizations and others together around important community health issues. Over the past several years, CHBs have advocated to Nova Scotia Health and all three levels of government on a wide range of issues impacting the social determinants of health, including food security; healthy eating and healthy school food; housing and homelessness; rural transportation; poverty and universal basic income; early childhood education; vaping; cannabis; physical activity; access to community mental health supports, and many other issues.

The following are just a few examples of recent CHB advocacy:

## National School Food Program

The Provincial Council of CHB Chairs prepared a resource document of food security programs and advocacy efforts across all four of the Nova Scotia Health Zones. This resource informs CHB advocacy work, and can be used to identify collaboration and partnership opportunities, including amongst all CHBs provincially and with other community organizations. The Council endorsed Nourish Nova Scotia's school food advocacy work. They wrote to the Prime Minister, key members of the House of Commons, and all Nova Scotia MPs advocating for the continued development of a national school food program.

## Vaping Report Cards

Community identified youth vaping as a concern and brought partners on board including Halifax Regional Police, Public Health, Smoke Free NS, and Mental Health and Addictions (Nova Scotia Health) to provide education and create discussion opportunities for community stakeholders. The Cobequid CHB continued its advocacy with partners and created the Vaping Report Card - a tool to grade the Vaping Policy in Nova Scotia. The Report Card was endorsed by the Central Zone Council of CHB Chairs, and shared with CHBs province wide. The Cobequid CHB continued updating the report card as policy changed. The Cancer Society joined the community partners in this important work.

# Looking Ahead: Challenges and Opportunities

Nova Scotia has been called “data rich, information poor”. There are many sources of demographic, health, and public opinion information available from various organizations, and many excellent analytical reports published. Translating this knowledge into meaningful, actionable information for CHB volunteers is a challenge. Many of these data sources are built on geographical boundaries that differ from the CHB boundaries. CHB volunteers also need support to fully understand the population health implications of these data in the context of all the other information available, including the experience of communities.

CHBs work within the Nova Scotia Health structure, and they gain a great benefit from this relationship by partnering with and getting support from Public Health, Mental Health and Addictions, Primary Health Care and others. But CHBs continue to be challenged to have a broad influence on the social determinants of health and the health of the Nova Scotians, which are central elements of the CHB mandate. CHBs need to build relationships across different sectors and with many provincial government departments going forward if they are going to directly influence the health of the population.

The rising cost of living combined with wage stagnation impacts all of the social determinants of health. While CHBs have long advocated for measures to address poverty and social and income inequalities, the current conditions affecting Nova Scotia means CHB efforts and advocacy on poverty and social inequality are more important than ever.

The numbers of CHB members across the province has been steadily declining for many years. CHBs are struggling to recruit new members. Data from Statistics Canada and a report from Volunteer Canada in recent years confirm that Canadians’ preferences for volunteering are changing dramatically. These days, people are seeking volunteer activities they can do with family and friends, that have limited time demands, and which produce tangible and immediate outcomes. CHBs have created a volunteer recruitment strategy aimed at stemming their declining membership. It places emphasis on attracting youth members and members from diverse and underrepresented communities, and promotes and celebrates the partnerships and achievements of CHBs.





**We hope you have enjoyed learning about  
Community Health Board work in  
communities and hearing about some of  
their many accomplishments since 2018.**

**For more information about Community  
Health Boards or to become a volunteer,  
visit:**

**[communityhealthboards.ns.ca](http://communityhealthboards.ns.ca)**