

Healthy Social Environments: How can we facilitate social connectivity at the neighbourhood level and why does it matter?



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

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PST

Speaker:

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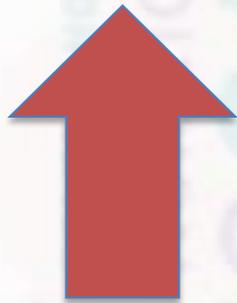
People who are socially disconnected are less likely to receive help from others, which could make a critical difference in times of crisis or emergency.

... 50% greater risk of dying early (the same impact as smoking 15 cigarettes a day).

... more likely to be in the top 5% of health care users, which accounts for more than 50% of total healthcare spending.

“Connected Communities, Healthier Together” Annual Report, Ontario Chief MHO, 2017

When people feel connected to each other, to their local neighbourhood & to public institutions...



- Trust, cooperativeness, resiliency
- Social, physical and mental health
- Physical activity
- Healthy eating



- Anxiety
- Depression
- Distrust
- Isolation
- Premature death

The strength of our social connections, our feelings of inclusion and support in our relationships and communities, is integral to our physical and mental health.^{1,2} People with weak social connections have a 50% greater risk of death than those with stronger connections; an effect on mortality as strong as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.³ This is particularly important because evidence tells us that in our communities social connections are becoming weaker and people are becoming lonelier and more isolated.⁴

Strong social connections are thought to enhance health by buffering the negative effects of stress and promoting healthier behaviours.^{5,6} It turns out that our perceptions of social support can help us cope and recover from stressful situations faster.⁷ Effective stress management has been shown to lower anxiety and inflammation while enhancing immunity.^{8,9} When we feel connected we value and encourage healthier behaviour for ourselves and others through activities like exercise, eating well, and adhering to medical regimens.¹⁰

We can take action to build social connectedness. For example, our built environments help shape the structure of our community and can facilitate or impair the development and maintenance of our social connections and health behaviours.¹¹ Community design can facilitate active mobility, create natural spaces for gathering and promote feeling safe and secure. This way, community design can create environments that foster social connection.^{12,13} When our environments become places of social inclusion and support, we are all more resilient.

Data for this report on social connection are from the **My Health My Community survey**, which was conducted in 2013-2014 across the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Over 33,000 people, aged 18 years and older, participated in the survey in this report we describe social connection primarily through two indicators.

1) Perception of community belonging (somewhat strong/very strong sense of community belonging is a primary indicator in this report, **has been described as strong sense of community belonging**).

2) The number of people you can confide in, tell your problems to, or call when you really need help (4 or more people to confide in is a primary indicator in this report).

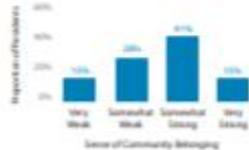
Combined, these indicators provide insight into the strength of our social networks and broader communities to foster health and well-being in our region.



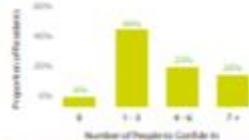
KEY MESSAGES

-  43% OF RESIDENTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S LOWER MAINLAND REPORT LOW OR VERY LOW SENSE OF COMMUNITY BELONGING.
-  FEELING LIKE WE BELONG IN OUR COMMUNITY AND HAVING PEOPLE TO CONFIDE IN ARE STRONG INDICATORS OF GENERAL & MENTAL HEALTH.
-  HEALTHY BEHAVIOURS LIKE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EATING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE REPORTED BY THOSE WITH GREATER SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS.
-  PEOPLE WITH LOWER LEVELS OF SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS REPORT HIGHER LEVELS OF STRESS.
-  PEOPLE IN NEIGHBOURHOODS WITH HIGHER RESIDENT RATED BUILT ENVIRONMENT FEATURES REPORT GREATER SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS.
-  THE LENGTH OF TIME YOU LIVE IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD IS STRONGLY RELATED TO COMMUNITY BELONGING REGARDLESS OF WHETHER YOU RENT OR OWN YOUR HOME.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY BELONGING AMONG RESIDENTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S LOWER MAINLAND



NUMBER OF PEOPLE TO CONFIDE IN AMONG RESIDENTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S LOWER MAINLAND



VCH “My Health My Community” (2018)

People who feel strong connection to community are 2.6 times more likely to be in good health

People with 7+ confidants are 3.4 x more likely to be in good mental health

32% of British Columbians do not feel a sense of belonging in their community (43% in Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health regions)



Social connectedness = the degree to which you feel connected to other people and have a sense of belonging in your communities.

It includes:

- **Social Capital** – access to resources & support
- **Social Cohesion** – feelings of belongingness
- **Social inclusion** – participation & engagement

Social environment: *What is it?*

The ***social environment*** is the underlying social, cultural & economic contexts within which we live. It includes all of the structures & processes we create, relationships we have, and actions we take to organize and improve our lives

- Present at multiple levels
- People centre/relationship oriented
- Comprised of multiple interconnected features
- Influenced by power relations



If we create local policies & initiatives to increase social connections... and stick to our core values of equity & sustainability....



Community well-being
the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfill their potential.

Community Well-being: A Framework for Design Professionals, DIALOG

“healthy people in vibrant communities”





Healthy Built Environments Linkages Toolkit

- Neighbourhood design
- Housing
- Food systems
- Natural environments
- Transportation



- Arts & Culture
- Recreation
- Civic Engagement
- Local Economy
- Service Environment



**Healthy
Social
Enviro
Framework**

Methodology

Nov 2018

Exploratory consultation

Lit searches, vetting & assessment

Theming and rolling up the evidence

Nov-Dec 2020

Consultation on draft principles and content

Feb 2021

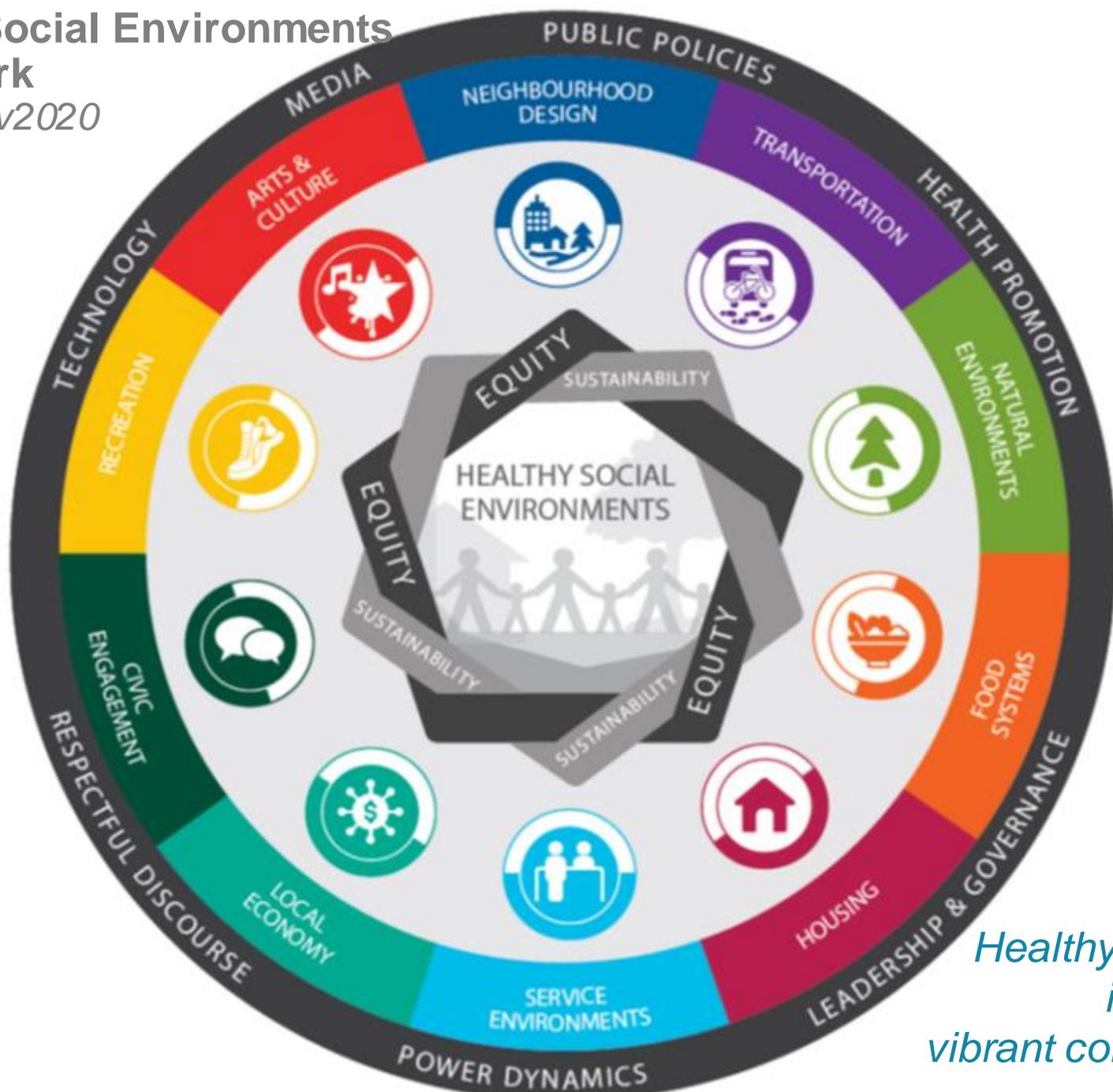
Final report and KT materials

2000 findings assessed + 131 ppl consulted = 51 draft principles

Keywords and Terms	
<p>Leadership – impact of leadership and impact of lack of leadership Peer mentorship (social driver) Governance systems and structure How worldviews/dominant paradigms shape the environment</p>	<p>Social connection, social-connectedness (outcome) Sense of belonging Loneliness</p>
<p>Policy Integration of policy and programs Governance mechanisms</p>	<p>Social support (outcome) Social capital (outcome) Social cohesion Social integration Social networks</p>
<p>Reconciliation How can we include the urban indigenous populations?</p>	<p>SDOH Poverty reduction Education Local economy Social Coping</p>
<p>Place-making – making spaces/ places (e.g. art, vibrant spaces)</p>	<p>Resiliency Protective factors</p>
<p>Community engagement, Grassroots and how it is important for empowerment of comm. community participation</p>	<p>Community wellness Happiness</p>
<p>Safe Focus on security and stability Crime Prevention through Environmental Design Acceptance Too much hostile design – pushing out marginalized individuals/homeless individuals from spaces (Who are we making safe and from who?) Cultural Safety LGBTQ2S Considerations for Safety and Inclusion</p>	<p>Non-built environment – Q: how do we differentiate between built/non-built (natural environment?) What is the non-built environment?</p>
<p>Reconciliation Self-determined Colonial vs. traditional The importance of history and how it impacts SE</p>	<p>Identity (ethnic, sexual, gender) Who does the art/space represent and do people see themselves reflected?</p>
<p>Equity – Equitable Access (how do you define equitable access in SE?) Production of social inequalities</p>	<p>Inclusivity, inclusive or inclusionary design Social exclusion Social isolation Age-friendly (8-80 Cities; Child-friendly cities) Intersectionality lens Intergenerational spaces</p>
<p>Sustainability</p>	<p>Culture</p>
<p>Public Realm</p>	<p>Winter City Design (how do you design for communities that can't go outside due to climate)</p>
<p>Programmable and non-programmable spaces for people to connect</p>	
<p>Physical and Spiritual Health</p>	

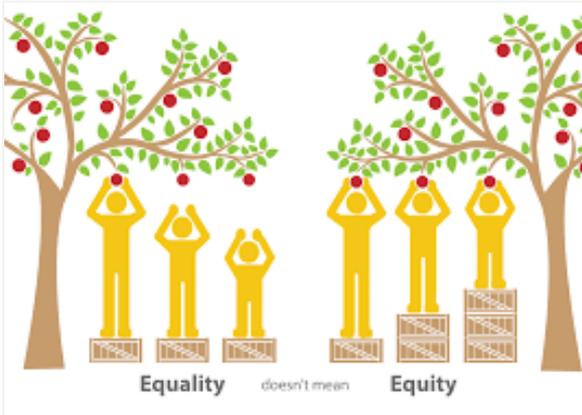
Healthy Social Environments Framework

draft 24Nov2020



*Healthy people
in
vibrant communities*

Values



Equity

- Truth & Reconciliation
- Cultural safety & humility
- Diversity
- Inclusivity
- Availability, affordability acceptability & accessibility



Sustainability

- Healthy community environments
- Meaningful, inclusive & respectful community engagement
- Multisolving approach & co-benefits
- Resiliency, trust & flexibility

Features & Principles



Transportation



Built Environment Principles

- Use street designs that prioritize active transportation.
- Make active transportation networks safe & accessible for all ages & abilities.
- Design connected routes for active transportation & support multiple modalities.
- Consider aesthetics of road, rail & waterway networks.



Social Environment Principles

- Promote programs that help foster a culture of active transportation (AT) and support people in reducing personal car use:
 - Address barriers and change attitudes & behaviours
 - Provide financial incentives to encourage AT & disincentives to discourage car use
 - Prioritize workplace interventions that encourage changes in commuter behaviour
- Promote active transportation interventions that facilitate neighborhood involvement and prioritize interventions that help promote social support & interaction.

Tools & Facilitators



The Whole Story

Community Wellbeing



Interventions

- Technology & media
- Programs & incentives
- Policies & regulations
- Health promotion
- Community engagement
- Neighbourhood-led projects
- Partnerships

Social Connection

Social capital
Access to resources & support

Social cohesion
Belonging

Social inclusion
Participation & “being seen”

Population-health
Mental wellness
Physical health
Social wellbeing
Emotional health
Spiritual health
Happiness * QOL

Community-based
Economic health
Environmental health
Community resiliency
Sustainability
Civic participation
Neighbourliness
Leadership
Equity
Trust

If we pursue the practice principles

and apply the values

while implementing SE & BE interventions

we get these outcomes in the short-term

and can achieve these outcomes in the long term

- Initiate conversations
- Frame presentations, proposals & briefing documents
- Quick reference to health evidence & expert perspectives
- Guide research & education
- Encourage collaborative action by community stakeholders



**How can I
use this
Framework
?**

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Healthy Social Environments Framework

What is the social environment?

The social environment is the underlying social, cultural and economic context within which we live, work & play. It includes all the interpersonal elements of our environments and encompasses all of the structures and processes we create, relationships we have and

What is this Framework?

The Healthy Social Environments (HSE) Framework is a user-friendly, evidence-based, and expert informed tool that builds on recommendations offered in the Healthy Built Environment Linkages Toolkit. It describes the social and built environment as inextricably connected and mutually reinforcing.

The HSE Framework asserts that if we strive to pursue practice principles for each of the ten social environment features while we are implementing social interventions, we can achieve positive social connections in the short-medium term and achieve community wellbeing as an end result. The ultimate goal is broadly operationalized as "healthy people living in vibrant communities".

In order to achieve community wellbeing, the social environment must also support health equity by advancing economic, environmental and social sustainability, and fostering belonging, inclusivity, and diversity.

How might this Framework be used?

This Framework is designed to be involved in informing decisions:

- community planning (engineers)
- local and regional health professionals
- others involved in schools, faith, and community
- frame and organize briefing documents
- provide health community planning strategies
- guide research
- encourage co-

Healthy Social Environments Framework - The Whole Story

10 Features of Healthy Social Environments	Core Values	Social Environment Interventions	Intermediate Outcome: Social Connection	Long-Term Outcome: Community Wellbeing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neighbourhood Design Transportation Natural Environments Food Systems Housing Service Environments Local Economy Civic Engagement Recreation Arts & Culture 	<p>Equity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Truth & Reconciliation Cultural safety & humility Diversity Inclusivity Availability, affordability, acceptability & accessibility <p>Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy community environments Community engagement Multisolving Resiliency & trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technology & media Programs & incentives Policies & regulations Health promotion (e.g., marketing & education) Community engagement Neighbourhood-led projects Partnerships <p>+ Built Environment Interventions</p>	<p>Social capital: Access to resources & support</p> <p>Social cohesion: Belonging</p> <p>Social inclusion: Participation & "being seen"</p>	<p>Population health: Mental health, Physical health, Emotional health, Occupational health, Happiness + Quality of Life</p> <p>Community health: Economic health, Community resilience, Community participation, Leadership + Engagement, Neighbourhood vitality</p>

If we strive to pursue practice principles for each feature → and we apply these values → while we are implementing these interventions → we can achieve these outcomes in the short-medium term → and then...

Healthy Social Environments Framework - Core Values

Two critical core values underlie the work of supporting healthy social environments: equity and sustainability. These values describe the outcomes we are trying to achieve as well as the fundamental approach to how we must do our work. We use the equity and sustainability principles below to guide our processes and also as touchstones to assess whether or not we are achieving community wellbeing.

EQUITY

Truth and Reconciliation

- Truth and Reconciliation is pursued as a multigenerational goal through collective efforts.
- Meaningful, inclusive opportunities for Truth and Reconciliation are actively encouraged & supported.

Cultural safety, humility & systemic racism

- Cultural safety is pursued through respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the healthcare system.
- Cultural safety is pursued through a process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust.
- Systemic racism (also known as structural or institutional racism) is identified and addressed by changing requirements, conditions, practices, policies or processes that maintain and reproduce avoidable and unfair inequities across ethnic/racial groups. Historical structures that have created health inequity in the first place are identified and addressed.

Diversity

- Individuals and families from different cultures and communities "see" themselves represented and feel welcome, safe and at ease within the community.
- Diversity in governance and make-up of decision-making groups is prioritized.
- Diversity is defined in broad terms, is viewed as an asset, is sought out, and is embraced.

Inclusivity

- All voices are included, heard and valued.
- Proactive efforts are taken to seek out those who are often excluded from community conversations. Steps are taken to not only remove barriers to their participation, but also elevate their voices in decision-making. Community members are equal partners vs. voices to be included.
- The principles of intersectionality are recognized and inform any actions to address inequities.
- Inclusive and accessible mechanisms are in place to for residents to meaningfully engage formally & informally.
- Civic/community responsibility is considered a key part of inclusivity.
- Opportunities exist for kindness and acts of service.

Availability, affordability, acceptability & accessibility

- Services and amenities are available, affordable, acceptable, and accessible.

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