A Public Health Framework

for Newfoundland and Labrador

Preventing Disease, Promoting Health and Protecting Current and Future Generations

Newfoundland & Labrador

CONTENTS

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Terms used in this framework, not otherwise defined in the document, follow the descriptions defined in this section. There are no widely agreed definitions of these terms, however the descriptions outline the intended interpretation. The definitions are adapted from various sources, which are listed following each term.

Capacity Building

Processes and activities that maximize individual and community potential. A comprehensive approach to capacity building nurtures excellence and expansion in all areas of human and community development: physical, psychological, social, cultural, environmental and economic. In this way, capacity building helps strengthen the ability of individuals, organizations and sectors in order to develop creative solutions that address community issues.[1]

Communities

A group of people who share a community of place or other identify-forming characteristics who are linked by social-ties and share common perspectives.

Community engagement

The process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices.[2]

Essential public health functions

A list of minimum requirements for countries to ensure public health.[3]

Health

The state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.[4]

Health disparities

Preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations.[5]

Health-in-all policies

An approach that systematically considers the health and social implications of policies contemplated by all sectors of government — aiming for synergistic benefits and to minimize social and health-related harms.[6]

Health inequities

Systematic and avoidable differences in health outcomes between population groups.[3]

Municipal Governments

Local elected authorities. They include cities, towns and rural or metropolitan municipalities.

Public health system

The constellation of all public, private and voluntary entities that contribute to the delivery of public health services within a jurisdiction. The systems are a network of entities with defined roles, relationships and interactions.[7]

Social Justice

The fair and compassionate distribution of economic, political and social rights and opportunities.

Whole-of-government approach

Working across departments and agencies to implement a coordinated response to a complex issue or challenge.[8]

Whole-of-society approach

All members of society play a critical role in setting the public agenda and influencing public decisions.[9]

INTRODUCTION

Health is primarily understood as relating to illness, and health care services are predominantly concerned with treating and caring for ill-health. Public health however is the organized effort of society to keep people healthy and prevent illness, injury and premature death.[11] The multi-faceted, interdisciplinary field of public health is often poorly understood, which can lead to a narrow interpretation of its core purpose and of its implementation in policy and practice. An understanding of the nature of positive health, how it is created and maintained at a population level, provides the basis for public health practice.[11]

The Division of Public Health within the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has a vision of healthy, vibrant, resilient communities – where all community members share a sense of belonging and experience fair opportunity to reach their fullest health potential. The discipline of public health is essential to this vision because of its values of social justice and fairness for all, its focus on addressing the underlying determinants that affect health, and its acknowledgment of health as a human right.

Through the public health system, our objective is to protect and promote health and well-being, to prevent disease and disability, to eliminate conditions that harm health, and to affect the social determinants challenging prevention efforts. In achieving these objectives, public health must consider the health of the planet that nourishes and sustains the diversity of life.[12] The relationship between human beings and the environment they are part of cannot be considered separately. Our actions must respond to the fragility of our planet and our obligation to safeguard the physical and human environments within which we exist.[13]

Gains have been made in health and well-being over recent decades through public health actions, some of which include vaccine preventable diseases, enhanced motor vehicle safety, improvements in maternal and child health, increased food safety, and reduced tobacco use. Advances in the health of the population are not irreversible. Continuous effort must be made to maintain and advance improvements in our public health system and to lessen the impact of the social and ecological determinants of health.[14]

PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICE

Public health practice can be viewed as an approach to maintaining and improving the health of populations that is based on evidence-informed policy and practice that places health promotion, health protection, population health surveillance and assessment, emergency preparedness, and the prevention of death, disease, injury and disability at its core.[15] Public health researchers, practitioners, and educators identify the causes of disease, and implement large-scale solutions grounded in addressing the social determinants of health equity.[16]

The social determinants of health are the social and economic factors that influence people's health. These factors include the living and working conditions that people experience every day which can positively or negatively affect their health.[17] These factors, such as income and access to food, are not distributed equally or fairly in society. Health inequities are differences in health status or in the distribution of health resources between different population groups, due to social, political and economic conditions. The social determinants of health inequities are the structural processes that cause this unequal and unjust distribution. Public health works to address the underlying cause of inequitable and unfair distribution of resources that support health.

The topics and issues addressed through the practice of public health have evolved over time, and will continue to do so as we incorporate new learnings based on research and respond to evolving health needs of the population in an ever changing and globalized environment. As our environmental and health priorities evolve, the underlying 'tools of the trade' used to address these concerns will remain consistent. These tools form the building blocks of a public health response to any threat to the health of the population and include: evidence, risk assessment, policy, programs, evaluation and partnerships.

MULTI-SECTORAL COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC HEALTH

"It's not enough to have epidemiologists, virologists, etc. It's also important to have historians, to have anthropologists, to have Indigenous Elders, to have Black Elders, to have representatives from several communities, to have people who are experts in decolonization, to have a plethora of people so that we can approach and tackle problems with several solutions."

-What We Heard Report participant (Pg. 41 Chief Public Health Officer Report 2022)

Public health takes action on many complex and often times difficult to achieve determinants of health that require equally complex solutions. Due to this complexity, deliberate collaboration among stakeholder groups (e.g. government, private sector, community, etc.) and multiple sectors (e.g. environment, finance, justice, etc.) is crucial to develop a comprehensive plan for identifying factors that affect health and developing long-term strategies for change. Engaging multiple sectors allows partners to share knowledge, expertise, resources, and reach as they work together to improve the health of the population and reduce health disparities.[18/19]

Community engagement and partnership are also critical elements needed to achieve improved health outcomes.[20] Public health leaders have a responsibility to engage communities in decision-making, planning, design, governance and delivery of services.[21] These community partnerships are the precursor to building capacity and empowerment. Capacity building at the community level can advance health equity by enabling communities that experience disparities to access the resources that shape conditions which affect their health and well-being.[22] Experiences of discrimination, racism and historical trauma are important social determinants of health for certain communities such as Indigenous Peoples, 2SLGBTQIA+ and people of colour that have resulted in health disparities.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

The public health system includes all levels of governmental and non-governmental entities which share in the responsibility for ensuring a healthy population and consist of a variety of organizations that contribute to the essential functions of public health to prevent illness, protect, and promote health within communities.[24] The lead entities that work together to support our public health system are:

Federal Government

Federal support for public health is provided through the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) which was established in 2004 to advance collaboration on public health across federal, provincial and territorial governments. PHAC has a mandate for national leadership and action on public health issues. Other Federal departments that support public health include, but are not limited to Health Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Natural Resources Canada, and Parks Canada.

Provincial Government

At the provincial government level, Public Health is the division within the Department of Health and Community Services that takes the lead role in steering the province towards enhanced population health and equity. As the health of our population is impacted by social, economic, and political factors outside of public health, government has enacted legislation that includes public health in the decision-making process across government through a Health-in-All Policies approach. This strategy assists all government actors to integrate considerations of health, equity and well-being into policy and services to ensure a beneficial or neutral impact on the determinants of health.[25]

Indigenous Government and Organizations

Indigenous peoples determine and develop health, housing and other economic and social programs in their communities. Indigenous Governments and organizations collaborate with the Provincial Government and other partners in a manner that supports their self-governance and their perspectives on the social and ecological determinants of health.

Provincial Health Authority

The provincial health authority, Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services (NLHS), is responsible for the provision of public health programs and services and has responsibility for the amalgamation of previously geographically-bound authorities within a single province-wide agency. The NLHS requires sustained and sufficient resources to fulfill these essential functions.

Municipal Governments

At the local level, municipal governments engage with various partners on issues that can impact health, such as drinking water, land use planning, sport and recreation. They are able to incorporate health considerations into community design plans to create health enhancing communities.

Communities

Communities work with NLHS, non-government organizations, and other partners and provide leadership in assessing their needs and resources. Communities participate in actions to promote health and equity.

DIRECTION FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Direction for public health and well-being is provided by the Department of Health and Community Services to enhance the health and well-being through both whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. Leadership for public health and well-being is provided by the Department of Health and Community Services and Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to supporting an efficient and effective public health system. The Public Health Protection and Promotion Act was introduced in 2018. The purpose of the Act is to:

• Promote health and well-being;
• Protect individuals and communities from health risks;
• Prevent disease, injury and disability;
• Provide a healthy environment;
• Provide measures for detecting and monitoring disease;
• Improve the health of the population and vulnerable groups;
• Promote health equity by addressing the social determinants of health.

To create and maintain a flexible and responsive system, the Department of Health and Community Services has oversight for the following:

Governance
- legislation and regulation
- policy and program development
- health and cross-sector policy (including Health-in-All-Policies)
- provincial strategy
- accountability and transparency

Partnership engagement
- collaboration within and outside of health sector government, community, and private sector (also a responsibility of the NLHS)

Capacity
- financing
- workforce development for public health (also a responsibility of the NLHS)
- public health infrastructure (capable and informed agencies that can assess and respond to public health needs)

Information
- surveillance
- monitoring and evaluation including the health determinants
- research and evidence
- innovation

FRAMEWORK PURPOSE AND DESIGN

The purpose of this framework is to organize information around the public health system in Newfoundland and Labrador and outline processes established to support advancing this important work.

The Public Health Framework outlines the components that define public health:

• Vision, Mission and Guiding Values
• Essential Public Health Functions
• Building Blocks of Public Health
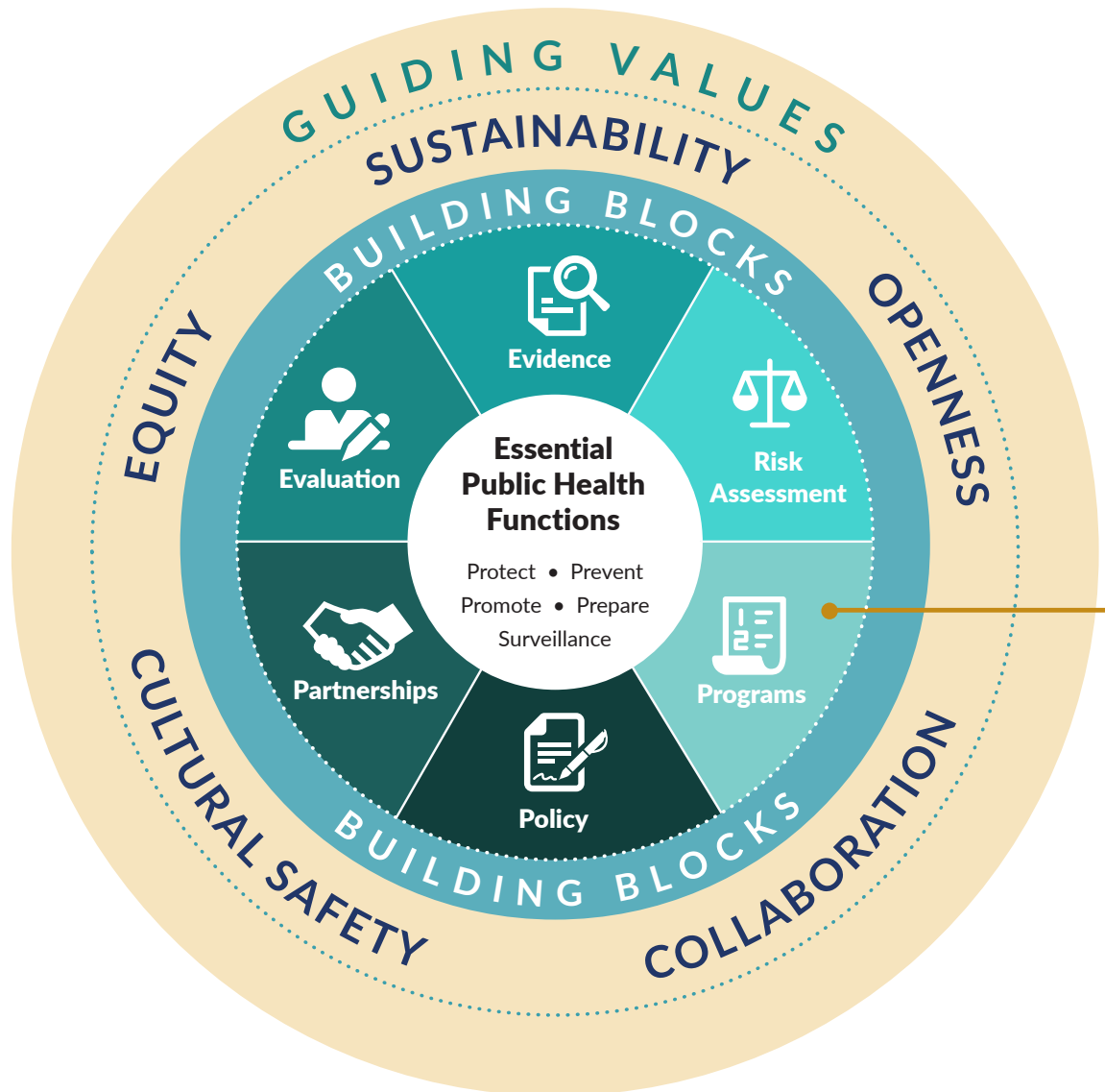• Core Public Health Programs

VISION

Healthy, vibrant, resilient communities.

MISSION

To protect and promote the health of the population by working with communities and Indigenous governments and organizations.

PUBLIC HEALTH FRAMEWORK FOR NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Core Public Health Programs

Communicable disease prevention and control

Assessment, surveillance, and epidemiology

Growth and development

Environmental public health

Health promotion, disease and injury prevention

Health emergency management

GUIDING VALUES

Five critical values guide the work of public health: equity, cultural safety, collaboration, sustainability and openness. These values describe the fundamental approach to how we do our work.

Equity

Public health works to create environments where all people can reach their full potential and are not disadvantaged from attaining it because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, social class, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation or other socially determined circumstance.[26]

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety is based on respectful engagement with all cultural identities. Cultural safety recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system, resulting in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people's needs and rights are safely met and partners are encouraged to draw strength from their culture, identity, and community.

Collaboration

The work of public health will be collaborative across jurisdictions, disciplines and sectors.

Sustainability

Public health actions will be sustainable to allow for the maintenance of health benefits, long-term continuation of initiatives, and enhanced capacity within communities to have ownership of health enhancing programs and resources.

Openness

Openness is the practice of leading with humility and engaging partners as equals in building a reciprocal relationship of learning that recognizes the expertise of community partners and engages those with lived experience.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF PUBLIC HEALTH

There are several activities that form the building blocks of all public health practice (see table 2), including policy, partnerships, evaluation, evidence, risk assessment, and programs. Public health practitioners continually adjust their practice based on the needs of the population with a focus on health equity, social justice, human rights, and the social determinants of health.[28]

Table 2: Building Blocks of Public Health

Building Block	Description
Policy	The legislation, regulations, procedures, actions, and decisions implemented within the province in order to promote well-being and ensure that specific health goals are met.
Partnerships	A collaborative, equal, and mutually beneficial relationship between partners such as policy makers, researchers, and community members. Collaborative partnerships support service delivery designed to improve the health of the population.
Evaluation	A systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using data to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of programs and, as importantly, to contribute to continuous program improvement.[30]
Evidence	Current, accurate and valid evidence is used to develop resources, programs or initiatives to improve the health of the population. Evidence is collected through research, surveillance, epidemiology, and community engagement.
Risk assessment	The process of determining if taking action on a specific issue, the nature and likelihood of negative health outcomes in individuals and communities is assessed, this includes: • Hazard identification • Hazard characterization • Exposure assessment • Risk characterization
Programs	The specific actions developed to address health protection, disease and injury prevention, health promotion and emergency response. **Table 3 provides details of these core public health programs.**

ESSENTIAL PUBLIC HEALTH FUNCTIONS

The essential public health functions are how the public health system works to achieve the aim of creating and maintaining healthy, vibrant, resilient communities (see table 1). These essential functions include health protection, disease and injury prevention, health promotion, health surveillance and population health assessment, and emergency preparedness and response.

Table 1: Essential Public Health Functions

Public Health Function	Description
Health protection	The protection of individuals, groups and populations through expert advice and effective collaboration to prevent and mitigate the impact of infectious disease, environmental, natural, biological and radiological threats. Health protection involves using the latest evidence to advance knowledge and guide practice and uses surveillance data to monitor the health of the population.
Disease and injury prevention	The promotion and implementation efforts to reduce the risk and severity of disease and injuries. Disease and injury prevention seeks to improve health and reduce health disparities and to build and influence the physical, social and economic conditions that will promote health and wellness, and prevent illness.
Health promotion	The process of implementing a range of social and environmental interventions that enable people and communities to increase control over and to improve their health.[27]
Health surveillance and population health assessment	The information collected to inform all public health work. Surveillance is the process of collecting health data to track diseases, the health status of populations, the determinants of health, and differences among populations. Assessment is the process of assessing the changing strengths, vulnerabilities, and needs of communities. Assessment and surveillance rely on the science of epidemiology, which focuses on describing health and disease in populations rather than in individuals. Epidemiology contributes information essential for understanding the determinants of health and for developing and evaluating public health programs.
Emergency preparedness and response	The coordination and management of emergency preparedness and response activities including emergency planning, training and simulation exercises, emergency operations centre management and incident command functions, situational monitoring and reporting and the management and coordination of resources and responsibilities pertaining to an emergency impacting the health of the population.

CORE PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS

The **program** building block is further broken down into six core programs (see table 3). The Provincial Health Authority has responsibility for implementing the core public health programs as identified in the regulations of the Public Health Protection and Promotion Act.

Table 3: Core Public Health Programs

Core Public Health Programs	Purpose
Communicable disease prevention and control	To reduce the burden and inequitable distribution of communicable disease and other infections.
Population health assessment, surveillance and epidemiology	To ensure programs and services are informed by population health data and respond effectively to current and evolving conditions that contribute to the public's health and well–being.
Growth and development in the early years	To optimize the well-being of children, youth and families in a variety of settings (Home, school, community) through the creation and reinforcement of supportive environments and practices during preconception and through the early years of children's development.
Environmental public health	To protect against exposure to health hazards, and promote the development of built and natural environments that: support health, and mitigate and adapt to emerging and existing risks, including changing climate.
Health promotion and non-communicable disease and injury prevention	To improve population health and lower the incidence of non-communicable disease and injury by facilitating the creation of health enhancing environments.
Health emergency management	To achieve optimal individual, community, and public health system resiliency and capacity to mitigate, prevent, plan, and prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies impacting the health of the population.

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