

Health Reflections

Newfoundland and Labrador



Message from the Minister



As Minister of Health and Community Services and Minister responsible for Aging and Seniors, I am pleased to present the first ever *Health Reflections* Report. This document provides Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with information about our health and our health system performance including areas where we are doing very well, areas needing improvement and ways to deal with our health

challenges to ensure that we all experience the best possible health and well-being.

Health and wellness is much more than the absence of illness or disease. It is a state of physical, emotional and mental well-being. Our income, education, genetics, physical and social environments and our lifestyle all influence our health as much, or even more than, the quality and availability of health services.

A great deal of effort has gone into improving the overall health of our province. Together with our partners, our government has introduced a number of strategies to address issues that affect our health and to support our people in living the healthiest lives possible.

These initiatives include our *Provincial Wellness Plan* which focuses on healthy living and *Working Together for Mental Health* which addresses the needs of persons with mental illness. As well, the *Poverty Reduction Strategy* and the *Violence Prevention Initiative* address factors such as poverty and personal safety and security that impact our overall health while our new *Healthy Aging Policy Framework and Action Plan* provides direction for how our province should support seniors now and in the future. Furthermore, a *Cancer Control Strategy* aimed at decreasing the frequency and burden of cancer in our province is being developed in collaboration with our government and key stakeholders in the province.

Helping the people in this province reach the best possible level of health and wellness is an important goal of this government. Reaching this goal requires partnering among all levels of government, regional health authorities, businesses, communities, families and individuals.

As we move forward, we will continue implementing this collaborative approach that encompasses a holistic view of health and well-being so that our people and our communities can be healthy and prosperous.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ross Wiseman'.

Ross Wiseman, MHA

Trinity North District

Minister of Department of Health and Community Services

Our Health

Life expectancy....

Life expectancy at birth, the number of years a person is expected to live from the time of birth, is often used to measure health.

How long a person lives is related to a number of things such as income, education, lifestyle, genetics or family history and the quality and availability of health services.

The latest information on life expectancy shows that babies born in this province in 2005 are expected to live 78.2 years, compared to 80.4 years for Canada. As in the past, women in this province and in Canada are still expected to live longer than men.

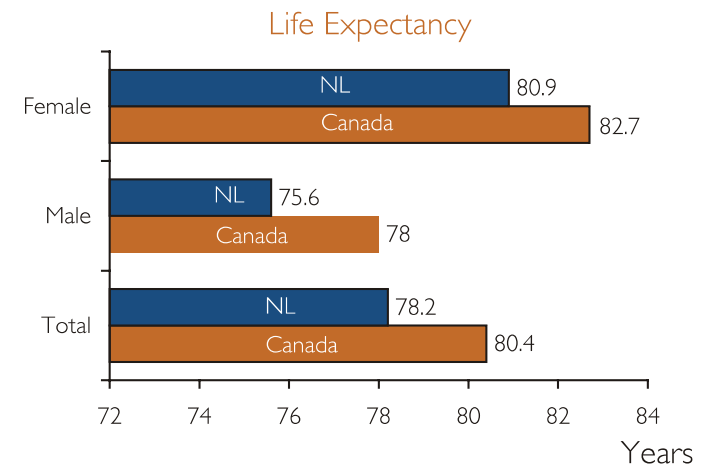


How healthy do we think we are?

Overall health....

The majority of people in our province have a very positive attitude about their health. In 2005 about 67% of people surveyed in Newfoundland and Labrador rated their overall health as very good or excellent, similar to Canada at about 66%.

A little over half (54%) of the province's older adults aged 65 and older, rated their health as very good or excellent, compared to about 40% for the country overall. There was little difference between how men and women of all ages rated their health.



Source: Statistics Canada, 2005



Our positive attitude about our health suggests people in this province have strong coping skills and a strong sense of well-being.

We feel very positive about our mental health

Most people in our province and in Canada also feel very positive about their mental health. In 2005, 75% of people surveyed in Newfoundland and Labrador and about 73% surveyed in Canada, rated their mental health as very good or excellent. There was little difference in how men and women responded.

Our mental health is a very important part of our overall health and wellness. It affects every part of our daily lives, how we get along with others, react to events and cope with life. While we feel very positive about our mental health, the reality is that about 20% of Canadians will experience mental illness during their lifetime.



Our Health Challenges

Based on our history, culture and current lifestyle, what are the greatest challenges we face in improving our health? Are certain life-long diseases occurring more often in our province than other parts of Canada? What are the causes of early death? Are there common risk factors in our population that put us at higher risk for health problems?

Chronic diseases challenge our health

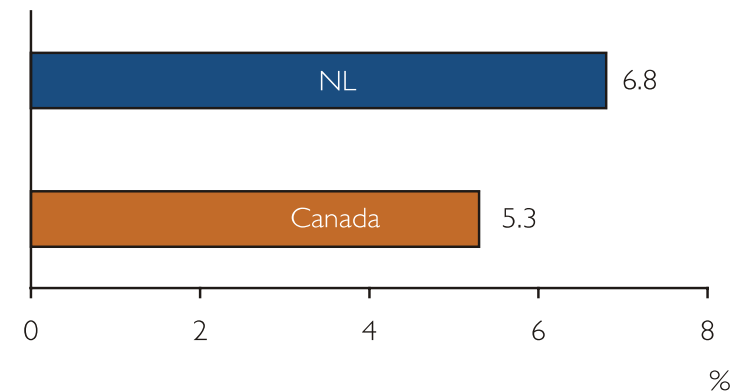
Diabetes and heart disease are two of the most common diseases in Canada. They are more common in our province than in Canada overall.



Diabetes

In 2002 the diabetes rate for people over the age of 20 years was about 7% for Newfoundland and Labrador compared to about 5% for Canada. This number is much higher in Aboriginal populations across Canada.

Diabetes Rate



Source: National Diabetes Surveillance System, 2001/2002

Diabetes is a lifelong condition where your body either does not produce enough insulin, known as type 1 diabetes, or it cannot use the insulin it produces, known as type 2 diabetes. Over time, uncontrolled diabetes can cause health problems such as heart disease, kidney failure, nerve damage and vision problems.

Almost 90% of all diabetes is type 2. The good news is that type 2 diabetes can often be prevented by exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet.

Cardiovascular disease

Cardiovascular or heart disease is very common in our population and across Canada. This disease can lead to a heart attack or stroke and is the number one killer in Canada.

Chances are you know someone who has been diagnosed with heart disease, either a family member or friend or perhaps you yourself have heart disease. According to provincial hospital data, in 2005 the main reason for 3500 admissions to hospitals in our province was for the treatment of heart disease. This number does not show the number of people in our province with heart disease, only those that required hospitalization for treatment.

Heart disease is linked to a number of risk factors. If you smoke, have high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, or are overweight, you are at a greater risk of developing heart disease.

Heart disease also tends to run in families. For example, if your parents, brothers or sisters had heart disease before age 55, then you are at greater risk for heart disease than someone who does not have that family history. Risk factors (including high blood pressure or diabetes) may also be passed from one generation to another.

Many of the risk factors for heart disease can be changed or treated by making healthy lifestyle choices and/or taking proper medicines. While you can't change your family history, living a healthy lifestyle can help improve your chances of warding off heart disease.



Causes of early death....

According to Statistics Canada, when a person dies before the age of 75 years it is considered early or premature, as potential years of life are lost. A person dying at age 50 for example, has lost 25 years of life.

According to the latest information available, the top three causes of early death in our province are cancer, circulatory disease and unintentional injuries or accidents.

Type	Years of potential life lost *	
	NL	Canada
All types of cancer	1675	1574
Circulatory disease (e.g., heart attack, stroke)	1113	854
Unintentional death (accidents)	581	612

*2003 – rate per 100,000 people aged 0-74

Source: Statistics Canada, 2003; Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information, 2006

Many early deaths can be prevented by taking better care of our health. For example, we can help prevent or decrease our risk for certain types of cancer by eating a healthy diet, exercising, choosing not to smoke and being involved in cancer screening programs. A healthy diet and exercise can also decrease our risk for circulatory disease. Accidents or unintentional injuries can often be avoided by practicing safe behaviors at work and at play.



Opportunities to Improve Our Health

Our lifestyle choices play a great role in determining our health and wellness. Many lifelong health problems are linked to risk factors such as smoking, poor nutrition and lack of physical activity. By making healthier choices throughout our lifespan, we can improve our physical and mental health and our overall sense of well-being!

It's never too late to make healthy choices!

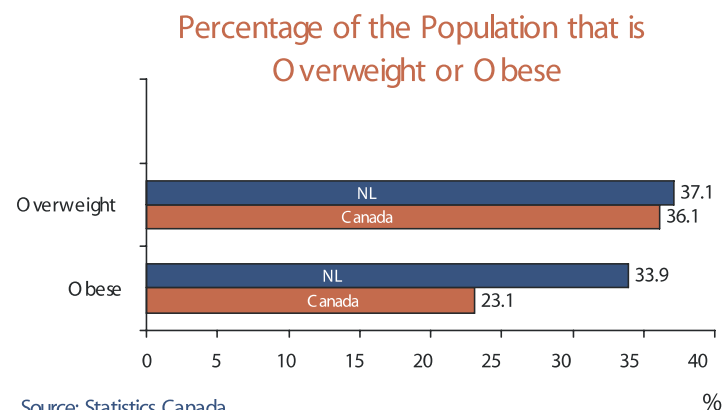
The first step to improving our health is learning about what we can do to improve it. Are Newfoundlanders and Labradorians making healthy choices? Are we active enough? Are we eating a healthy diet? Are we choosing to be smoke-free? Are we taking advantage of opportunities to protect our health?



Choose to be active!

According to the 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey (Cycle 2.2) in which exact measures of height and weight were recorded, about 37% of those surveyed in our province were overweight and an additional 34% were obese. This is higher than the national average of 36% and 23%. In our province and in Canada a greater percentage of men than women were overweight. There was little difference in the percentage of men and women that were obese.

The 2005 survey results show that both men and women in this province are less physically active than most Canadians. Men in our province and in Canada are more physically active than women.

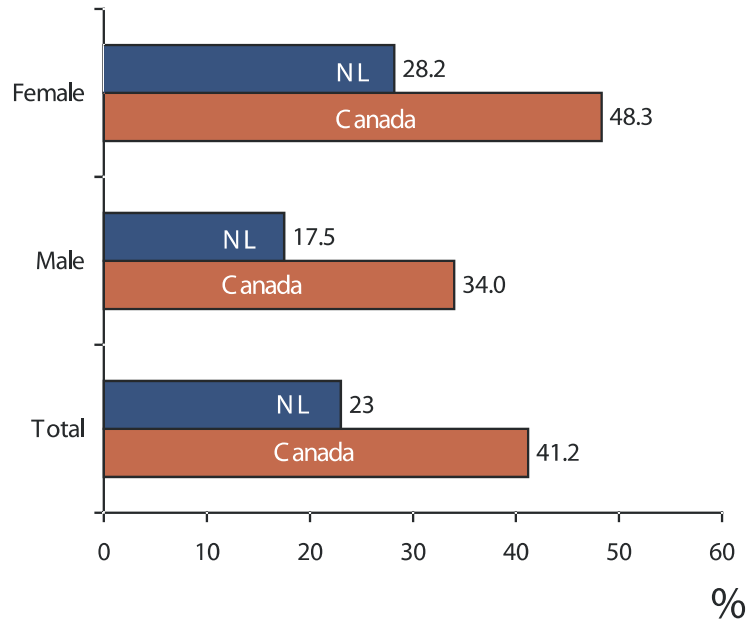


Source: Statistics Canada
Canadian Community Health Survey, Cycle 2.2, 2004

Choose to eat a healthy diet!

Survey results show that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are eating fewer fruits and vegetables than the Canadian average.

Eating Five or More Servings of Fruits and Vegetables Every Day



Source: Statistics Canada,
Canadian Community Health Survey, 2005



A balanced diet is a very important part of our overall health and wellness. Too much or too little of certain foods can put us at risk for illness. The nutrients in a healthy diet, high in fruits and vegetables, helps protect us against chronic diseases such as heart disease.



In February, 2007, Health Canada released an updated version of Canada's Food Guide. The Food Guide provides current information for eating well; how much and what types of food we should be eating. It also provides information about the importance of combining healthy eating with regular exercise in improving our health.

Meet Mabel...

Mabel is a busy, 40 year old mother of two. She has a strong family history of heart disease and was recently diagnosed by her family doctor with high cholesterol, a risk factor for heart disease. Her doctor recommended she increase her physical activity and eat a healthier diet. Mabel visited a dietitian who assisted her with making healthy food choices and suggested she visit the province's *Go Healthy* website for tips on healthy living. Mabel has since increased her physical activity, is eating a nutritious diet and now has a normal cholesterol level without the use of medication. She is healthier and happier than ever and is a great role model for her children.

A free copy of Canada's Food Guide is available at www.healthcanada.ca, or ask your health care provider where you can obtain a copy.



Healthy eating and physical activity are two focus areas of the *Provincial Wellness Plan*. As part of the Plan, students in our schools are learning about the importance of healthy living. The Department of Health and Community Services is working with the Department of Education in the *Healthy Students, Healthy Schools* initiative to create school environments that support healthy living for children and youth. Students and their families are provided with information about the importance of healthy living at school and at home.



School Food Guidelines have been introduced in schools across the province that will make sure students are provided with healthy food choices.

Government is also encouraging healthy living choices for people of all ages. Provincial departments are working with regional health authorities, community groups, businesses and organizations across the province to support programs that promote healthy living, and that provide opportunities for people in our province to make healthy choices.

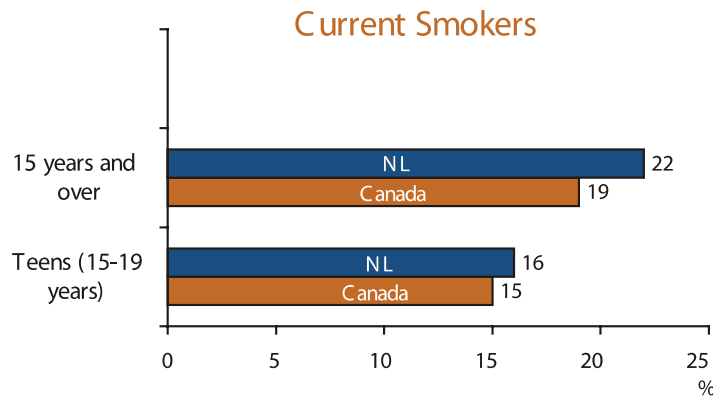
Take advantage of opportunities in your community or region to get moving and be active!



Choose to be smoke-free!

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in Canada. It causes many diseases such as heart disease, several types of cancer and lung diseases such as emphysema. The harmful effects of smoking reach people of all ages, unborn babies, infants, children, youth, adults and seniors.

The good news is that the majority of people in our province are non-smokers. According to the Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey, in 2006 only 22% of people surveyed reported they were smokers, slightly higher than the rest of the country at about 19%.



Source: Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey, 2006

For tips on active living, healthy eating, being smoke free and more, visit our Provincial Wellness Plan website at www.gohealthy.ca.



Efforts to reduce smoking in our province in the last number of years have been successful. The rate of smoking among adults and teenagers has decreased considerably. In 2000 approximately 28% of teenagers, 15-19 years of age, reported smoking compared to 25% for Canada. In 2006 only 16% of teenagers reported being smokers compared to 15% for Canada.

Most adult smokers start smoking when they are teens; for that reason it is very important to teach people about the harmful effects of smoking when they are young so they will choose to be smoke-free. As part of the Provincial Wellness Plan and the Provincial Tobacco Reduction Strategy, programs are being delivered in schools across the province encouraging children and youth to be smoke-free.

Choose to be involved in screening and immunization programs!

Being involved in activities that protect our health or alert us to health problems early, such as cancer screening and immunization programs, is very important in making sure we are the healthiest we can be.

Cancer screening

Women are encouraged by health providers to have regular mammograms and pap smears to help detect cancer in the very early stages. Finding cancer early is the key to survival for individuals with most types of cancer.

The Provincial Breast Screening Program recommends women aged 50-69 have a mammogram every two years to detect breast cancer. Women with a family history of breast cancer may be advised to have mammograms more often. In 2005 about 45% of women surveyed in our province reported having a mammogram in the last two years. This percentage is lower than for Canada overall which is about 51%.

The Cervical Cancer Screening Program encourages women to have a pap smear test done every year after they become sexually active to reduce their risks for cervical cancer. The latest data provided by the Provincial Cancer Care Program, Cervical Cancer Registry, indicates that less than half (42%) of the women aged 20-69 in the province had a pap smear test in 2006.

No one *likes* having a mammogram or pap smear test done; some women feel uncomfortable and self conscious. But remember, these simple, quick tests can help reduce the risk for cancer.



*Are you doing all
you can to
protect your health
and the health of your family?*

Influenza immunization

Influenza or flu season comes every year and many people in our province suffer through a bout of the flu. Most people who get the flu get better, however, some people such as young children, seniors and those who have certain life-long medical conditions are at a higher risk of being sicker for much longer. These people often develop complications such as pneumonia.

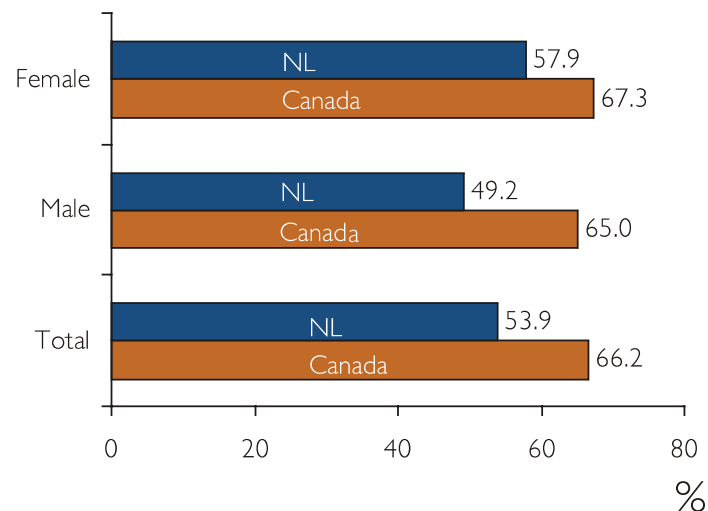


A flu shot can prevent the flu, decrease the severity of the flu and prevent the spread of the flu to others.

Health Canada recommends that these and other high risk groups get an influenza immunization or flu shot every fall before flu season begins. Our Provincial Immunization Program offers the flu shot free of charge to a number of high risk groups. The flu shot is available every fall from a public health nurse in your area or your family doctor.

According to the latest information available in 2005 only 54% of adults age 65 and older in our province reported having received a flu shot in the last year, compared to approximately 66% for Canada. In our province and Canada as a whole, more women than men reported having received the flu shot.

Influenza Immunization



Source: Statistics Canada,
Canadian Community Health Survey, 2005

A Responsive Health Care System

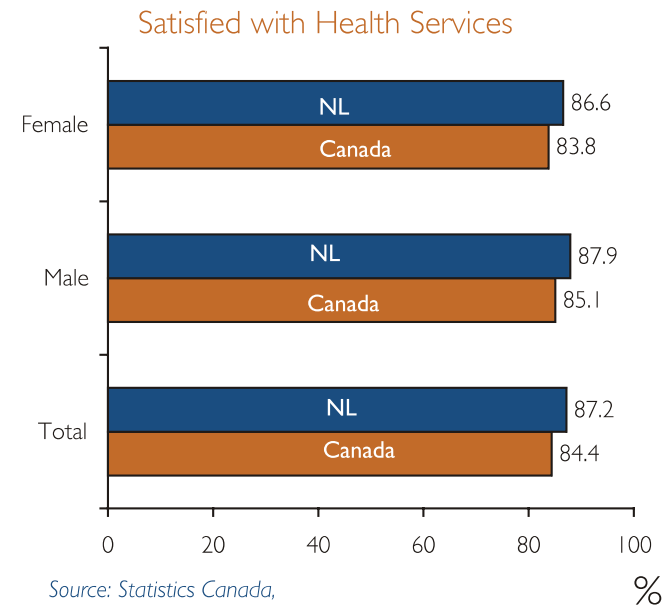
Along with our lifestyle choices, the quality and availability of health services play an important role in our health and wellness. In order for us to be as healthy as possible throughout our lifespan we need access to a health system that supports healthy living choices and responds to the changing health needs of individuals, families and communities in our province.

So how is our health system performing?

Are we satisfied with the health services we receive? Are we able to access services we need, when we need them? Are we able to access appropriate health providers such as a family doctor in our community or region? How are we planning now to meet the future health needs of our aging population?

Most people are satisfied with health care services

According to the latest survey data most people in our province are satisfied with the health care services they received. The great majority of people, about 87% said they were satisfied with health care services compared to 84% for Canada. There was little difference in the response of men and women in our province and in Canada overall.



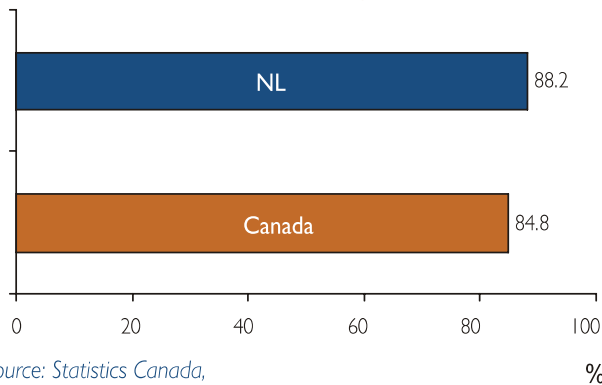
Most people report they can access health care when needed

In 2005 about 13% of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians reported having difficulty accessing routine health care any time of the day. In Canada about 16% reported difficulties.

Most people report having a family doctor

In 2005 most people, about 88% of those surveyed in our province, reported having a family doctor, compared to approximately 85% for Canada.

Report Having a Family Doctor



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2005



For health advice and information, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call the province's Healthline free of charge at 1-888-709-2929.



Access to appropriate care in the community

Most often routine health care needs can be met by health providers such as a family doctor or nurse in a community or region. Many visits are for primary health care needs, check-ups, treatment of minor illnesses or for the management of chronic or lifelong conditions.

The focus of primary health care is health promotion, disease prevention and chronic disease management.

Looking at the number of hospitalizations for medical conditions that could have been treated in the community provides information about access to appropriate primary health care services in the community or region. A high rate of hospitalizations for these conditions indicates that people are not accessing appropriate services in the community and therefore end up being hospitalized for treatment.

Newfoundland and Labrador has a higher rate of hospitalization for these conditions than Canada overall. This may reflect the challenges faced in providing care in rural areas. An improvement in this number can be expected as the numbers of primary health care sites are expanded in the province.

Meet Henry....

Henry is a 68 year old widower who has type 2 diabetes. His diabetes care is being managed by a primary health care team in his region. He receives regular follow-up by his family doctor and has been seen by the diabetes educator and dietitian in his region. The social worker on the team has assisted Henry in accessing a provincial prescription drug card to help with the cost of medication and supplies needed to treat his diabetes. Due to the excellent care he receives and his commitment to taking care of himself, his diabetes is well controlled and he has been able to avoid being hospitalized for the management of his diabetes.

Waiting for treatment

Waiting for medical treatments is a reality in our province, across Canada and around the world. According to the latest provincial wait time information for hip and knee replacements, cataract surgery, cardiac bypass surgery and curative radiotherapy, 70-100% of patients are receiving treatment in a timely manner.

Understanding why we wait for services may help us deal with the stress and frustration associated with waiting....



Why do we wait?

The amount of time people wait to receive a medical test or treatment depends on a number of things including the following:

- The number of requests received - as the number of people over the age of 65 years in our province grows, we can expect increasing rates of chronic conditions which will likely increase the demand for certain services.
- The availability of health providers to administer needed treatments.
- The growing number of new tests and services - offering a greater variety of services creates challenges in offering all tests and treatments in a timely manner.
- Waiting as part of your care - your health care provider may feel that it is in your best interest to wait for treatment to see if your condition improves over time or to see if a different treatment may be better.
- Missed appointments affect services - if you are unable to make your appointment and do not cancel, there is a missed opportunity to schedule someone else in your place so they can receive treatment sooner.

Ensuring our health system meets the needs of an aging population

In light of the fact that we are living longer than ever and our population is older than ever, we can expect the health needs of our population to change. We can expect to see an increase in chronic diseases and a greater need for certain services such as homecare, medications and programs that promote wellness throughout the lifespan. According to the latest hospital discharge information for 2005 over one third (36%) of those discharged from our hospitals were over the age of 65 years.

Government is planning now for the changing health needs of our aging population. The recently released *Provincial Healthy Aging Policy Framework* and Implementation Plan outlines areas we all need to focus on in the future to ensure healthy aging in our province.

*Planning for a healthy
tomorrow, today...*



Towards a Healthier Future

This report provides a picture of our health. By comparing ourselves to Canada, we have identified some of the health challenges of our population and opportunities to improve our health.

Meeting these challenges and improving the overall health of our population is a shared responsibility among the Provincial Government, regional health authorities, municipalities, businesses, communities, families and individuals.

Together with our partners, we are moving towards a healthier future focusing on wellness. We are investing in programs and services that support Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in taking better care of their health, making healthy lifestyle choices, being the healthiest they can be.





Acknowledgements:

This document was prepared by the Policy Development Division, Policy and Planning Branch, Department of Health and Community Services in collaboration with the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information.

The main source for much of the information is the 2005 Canadian Community Health Survey conducted by Statistics Canada. This report, as well as a companion document containing more details on the material included in this report, is available on the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador website at www.gov.nl.ca/health

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Newfoundland
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