

## **Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative**

**A Project of the Social Planning Network of Ontario  
funded by the  
Population Health Fund,  
Population and Public Health Branch,  
Health Canada (Ontario Region)**

### **Background**

The Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) is made up of 25 local social planning organizations across Ontario committed to working with their communities to improve social well-being and the quality of community life. Social planning councils are community-based organizations that do social research and social policy analysis, community development, public education and advocacy on issues related the health and social well-being of their communities.

With the funding support of the Population and Public Health Branch (PPHB) of Health Canada (Ontario Region), the SPNO has launched a Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative (SEII). The SEII is working with communities in six local areas over the next fifteen months to use a social inclusion framework on locally defined population health issues. The six participating communities in the SEII are: Toronto, Peel-Halton, Kitchener-Waterloo/Cambridge, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Kingston.

### **Population Health**

***Based on research, population health is grounded in the notion that many “determinants of health” contribute to the health of individuals and communities. These factors include income and social status, social support networks, employment and working conditions, education, gender, culture, physical and social environments and several others.***

In a paper for Health Canada (Atlantic Region), Janet Guildford writes,

“The overall goal of a population health approach is to maintain and improve the health of the entire population and to reduce inequities in health between population groups. In this approach, the entire range of known health factors and the conditions that determine population health status – and the interactions among them – are taken into account in planning action to improve health. Many of these factors are outside the health care system.”

*(Making the Case for Social and Economic Inclusion, 2000)*

Key principles in a population health approach are:

- promoting the direct participation of people in planning and decision-making on issues that affect their health and well-being;

- initiating and strengthening organizational partnerships and collaborative effort across sectors to address the broad determinants of health and to pursue positive health outcomes; and
- framing strategies for the development and implementation of healthy public policies, programs and practices.

### **Social and Economic Inclusion**

*Social and economic EXCLUSION is based on the reality that a variety of conditions exist and interact to exclude or “leave out” people in many groups and sub-populations in our society.* Economic inequality is frequently associated with conditions such as racism and vulnerability based on age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and other life circumstances. Therefore, people experience inequality and get pushed to the margins of society in many ways.

*Strategies for Social and economic INCLUSION focus on these multi-dimensional inequities and work to “close the distance” between excluded groups and the larger society* in the following ways:

- **Economic** – by reducing gaps in income that create inequities in the sharing of society’s wealth and that force people into poverty, including many children.
- **Spatial** – by making public space more accessible to all community members and providing health and social support services close to where people live (e.g. community-based services for people with disabilities rather than institutions far away from family and friends).
- **Relational** – by promoting positive relationships among groups and individuals within communities and across sectors so that all identify with, feel they belong to, and are part of the community (i.e. not isolated or “left out” for lack of social connections nor rejected or alienated by stereotyping and labeling).
- **Functional/Developmental** – by recognizing and valuing the worth and contributions of all members of the community and investing in the growth and developmental potential of all people (e.g. structuring learning/training environments for “street youth” in a way that motivates them and tailors education and training programs to their learning needs).
- **Participation/Political** – by ensuring that the structures and processes are in place so that everyone has a “voice” in the planning and decision-making that affects their quality of life.

*Clearly, population health and social and economic inclusion are not only compatible but also complementary and mutually reinforcing concepts.*

## Two Phases of SEII

Health Canada (Ontario Region) is funding the SPNO for a two-phase Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative (SEII).

- (1) Phase 1: Community Mobilization (October 1, 2002 – March 31, 2003):  
SPNO and its local social planning councils will work with community leadership in six regions to mobilize community participation and inter-sectoral collaboration on a priority population health issue using a social and economic inclusion approach. Outreach, engagement of other sectors, and a strategic planning process will provide the information and direction needed for each regional group to develop its own proposal to Health Canada for change at the policy and systems level in Phase 2. Phase 1 will conclude with an All-Region Conference in March 2003 to share information and learnings and to strategize for the next phase of the SEII.

The specific objectives for Phase I of the Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative are:

- (1) To define the priority population health issue to be addressed in each of the six regions for the application of a social inclusion strategic framework.
  - (2) To initiate inclusive planning processes on specific population health issues in the six selected regions.
  - (3) To involve additional funding partners in supporting the regional projects.
  - (4) To identify and engage inter-sectoral community leadership on social and economic inclusion projects in the six regions.
  - (5) To generate six regional proposals on social inclusion strategies for healthy public policy development to submit for Phase 2 of the Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative.
  - (6) To establish communications and information sharing mechanisms among the regional projects and for broader community information and interest.
- (2) Phase 2: Healthy Public Policy and Transformative Change (April 1, 2003 – March 31, 2004):

Each of the six regions will develop and advance a strategy that addresses exclusionary conditions in public policy, systems, structures, processes and/or practices that produce inequities for the priority populations that they have selected. These strategies will frame and advocate for *transformative* change in public policy, systems, institutions, organizational practices, and/or community attitudes that would reduce inequities and improve the health of the priority population and the community as a whole.

SPNO's objectives in Phase 2 are:

- (1) To provide strategic and technical support to the regional projects for planning and action on transformative healthy policy development, systems/institutional reform and/or innovative community practice.

- (2) To assist regional projects in building inter-sectoral linkages in their regions and externally for influence and impact on their priority population health issues.
- (3) To document and collect information from regional activity and share learnings across the projects and with the wider community of interests in social inclusion and population health.
- (4) To conduct a comparative evaluation of the processes, impacts and outcomes of the PHF projects at the regional level.
- (5) To secure ongoing resource commitments to the regional projects for continuing action on transformative change in policy, systems/institutions and community practices related to regional priority population health issues.

**Web site:** [www.closingthedistance.ca/index.jsp](http://www.closingthedistance.ca/index.jsp)

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