

# On the path together

Wellness Plan for Yukon's  
Children and Families



March 2014

### **Acronyms Used in this report:**

**CDF:** Community Development Fund

**CS:** Community Services (YG)

**Ec Dev:** Economic Development (YG)

**Ed:** Yukon Education (YG)

**Env:** Environment Yukon (YG)

**FPT:** Federal/Provincial/Territorial

**HIF:** Health Investment Fund

**HPW:** Highways & Public Works (YG)

**HSS:** Health and Social Services (YG)

**Justice:** Yukon Justice (YG)

**NGO:** Non-governmental organization

**WD:** Women's Directorate (YG)

**YD:** Youth Directorate (Executive Council Office, YG)

**YG:** Yukon Government

**YIF:** Youth Investment Fund

**YWCHSB:** Yukon Workers' Compensation Health & Safety Board

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Please see *On the Path Together: Supporting Documents* at [www.yukonwellness.ca](http://www.yukonwellness.ca) for

- Building the Wellness Plan – The details
- What we heard, what we learned
  - Child and Family Wellness Survey – Thematic Analysis
  - Flourishing – What we learned from the Yukon Passions Video Project
  - Stories that Inspire – What we learned from Yukon Communities
  - Reflections on Partnerships
- Kids Count! Indicator Snapshot
- Commitments we have made on the national scene



## Minister's Message

**M**ost Yukoners want to live long and well, and they want the best possible future for Yukon children. But this future is threatened by the rising tide of chronic conditions among Yukoners of all ages. Advances in medical science, new technologies and drugs allow us to live longer but they do not always return us to a state of well-being or improve the quality of our life. Research shows that for too many Canadians, the last 10 years of life are spent in sickness, disability, and immobility. Individuals, families, workplaces and communities all feel the impact. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Chronic disease is a key driver of health care costs in Canada, accounting for almost two out of every three dollars spent.

Preventing the occurrence of chronic disease, or delaying the onset, will reduce pressure on the health care system, and allow us to use our health care resources wisely.



The costs of chronic disease extend beyond the health care system. The economic costs of chronic disease due to lost income, reduced productivity and early departure from the workforce are even greater than the cost to the health care system. Yukon's prospects and prosperity depend on having a skilled and productive workforce that is home grown.

In 2008, the *Yukon Health Care Review* identified the need to invest in promoting well-being, and preventing illness and injury by targeting those areas that provide the best return on investments. It is more effective and less expensive to prevent illness than repair the damage after the fact.

There is no better place to focus our efforts than supporting families and communities to raise healthy, happy children.

We have an opportunity now to shape a good future for all our children. You have my commitment as your Minister of Health and Social Services, and as a father and grandfather, to work hard to keep wellness on the political agenda. But government action alone cannot create a better future.

Everyone has a role to play in promoting well-being. We need all Yukoners to take personal responsibility for their health and the health of their children. And together we can create the conditions which encourage and support responsible choices in our workplaces, schools, and communities.

There is no better time to act than now.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Doug Graham'.

Hon. Doug Graham  
Minister of Health and Social Services

# Message from Chief Medical Officer of Health

**M**y children often ask me: did you have a hospital day or an office day today? They have a pretty good idea of what a hospital day looks like: seeing patients in the emergency room, figuring out the problem, and helping the patient get better. The “office” day is more mysterious, less tangible. I tell them that I am trying to find ways to keep people healthy and prevent illnesses and injuries in the first place.

In a very simple way, that’s what a wellness plan is all about, and focusing on children and families is the ideal starting point. In the 2012 Yukon Health Status report, I commented that even if we are doing “okay” there is still much work to be done. Too many children need better supports to overcome vulnerabilities that interfere with their readiness to learn in kindergarten. Survey data tell us about important rural-urban differences in how attached older children and youth are to family and school, and how often they try out drugs and alcohol. Not all Yukon children and youth are doing well.



Children have an intuitive sense of fairness. My children say “that’s not fair” when arguing over unequal portions of some treasured drink or dish. And it’s true: not everyone gets the same opportunities and chances in life. In public health, we have a duty not only to describe the differences in health across different groups, but to move towards narrowing these gaps. Life should be, and can be, more fair.

We can strive to give all kids a good start in life. We can create better opportunities for children and young people to grow into strong, confident, generous, thriving adults. We can help families to do their very best to raise and support their children. Deliberate “family building” can strengthen known

protective factors – including attachment and good nutrition – that prevent or at least buffer the adverse effects and risks associated with negative influences like poverty and cultural trauma.

How can we do all this? Well, by moving this Wellness Plan ahead. This plan, grounded in the best evidence available, gives us a clear path forward. It shows how we can build on Yukon strengths, do more, and get better outcomes for all children.

I encourage you – as parent, teen, advocate, decision-maker, service worker, concerned citizen – to see yourself in this plan and discover how you can help move further towards wellness. I hope you are as inspired by this plan as I am, and that you will do your part to breathe life into it – now and for many years to come. My children, your children, all Yukon children will benefit from the gains that could be made – that will be made – as this plan is translated into action.

The next time I tell my children after a day in the “office” that I am helping Yukon become a healthier place, it will be with the knowledge that I am one of many who are working to make Yukon a place where they, their children, and all Yukoners will be able to flourish.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Hanley', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Brendan E. Hanley MD CCFP(EM) MPH

# Executive Summary

**W**ellness is about promoting well-being and preventing illness and injury. We want all Yukoners to live longer in good health, and we want to reduce the gap between the most and least healthy among us.

But chronic diseases like heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and depression, are on the rise. More people are being diagnosed, and at younger ages. If this trend continues, more people will live more years with a chronic disease than ever before.

Some people are more at risk of developing a chronic disease than others. Rates of many chronic diseases are higher among people with lower income, education, and social status.

The good news is that the majority of chronic diseases and about 50 per cent of cancers can be prevented through a combination of physical activity, smoking-free living, healthy eating, and avoidance of high risk drinking. New research suggests that effective stress management may also play a role in reducing chronic disease.

Evidence shows that experiences and environments in childhood and adolescence influence health, development, learning and behaviour throughout life, and the risk of chronic disease in adulthood.

There are two key influences that have a negative impact on future health:

- High levels of **stress in childhood** that are not buffered by caring and responsive adults can alter the development and functioning of the neurological, hormonal, metabolic and immune systems that underlie health and health behaviours like smoking, substance use, over-eating, and the body's response to stress.
- Several features of **modern living** – including easy access to foods high in fat, sugar and salt, modern conveniences that take activity out of daily living, and the presence of technology in our lives 24/7 – contribute to unhealthy eating, physical inactivity, poor sleep, and high stress in people of all ages, including children.

We can take steps to reduce these influences and raise healthy, happy children who are successful in school, work, and life. To give **every child** the best start in life, we need to take into account the needs and circumstances of families that experience greater challenges and have fewer opportunities to improve their health – generally speaking, these are low income families, rural residents and First Nations people.

This plan sets out three pathways to wellness that will improve health outcomes for children today and in the future.

1. **Getting a good start:** Supportive relationships with parents and other caring adults from infancy through adolescence reduce overall stress, and buffer the effects of stress that cannot be avoided. All parents and caregivers benefit from information on healthy child development and good parenting practices. Some parents, through no fault of their own, need more opportunities and support to develop the skills they need to be warm, responsive, effective parents.
2. **Raising kids who flourish:** Children and adolescents who have opportunities to develop their interests, get recognition and make meaningful contributions in their homes, schools and communities are much less likely to engage in the risk behaviours that are associated with chronic disease later in life.
3. **Healthy living for life:** Information, skills and environments that support healthy living enable people of all ages to make healthier choices for themselves and children in their lives.

Achieving wellness for all will take the combined efforts of everyone working together. Individuals, governments and all sectors, including businesses, non-profit groups, service clubs, and faith communities, all play a part in promoting the well-being of children and families.

Yukon Government has an important role in enabling families to raise children who thrive. This plan sets out specific actions that will be carried over the next few years, and a framework for measuring progress.

Individuals, other governments and other sectors are invited to use this plan as a roadmap for action. Small steps taken by many on the same pathways add up to “giant leaps.”





## At a glance: Wellness Plan for Yukon's Children and Families

<b>BELIEFS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Every individual and all sectors have a role to play in promoting well-being.</li> <li>➤ We can build on Yukon's strengths and successes.</li> <li>➤ Small steps taken by many add up.</li> <li>➤ The ideal starting point is to give all children and youth the best chance to be healthy, happy and successful in life.</li> </ul>		
<b>THE EVIDENCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are two modifiable influences that begin in childhood and increase the risk of chronic disease in later life: toxic stress and the effects of modern living.</li> <li>• Healthy child and positive youth development increase healthy decisions and behaviours, and decrease risk behaviours that contribute to chronic disease.</li> <li>• Healthy choices are easier to make when Information, opportunities to build skills and supportive environments are part of the solution.</li> </ul>		
<b>PATHWAYS</b>	<b>Getting a good start</b>	<b>Raising kids who flourish</b>	<b>Healthy living for life</b>
<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empower all parents to do their best for their children</li> <li>• Identify children and families who require more support or referral to specialized services as early as possible</li> <li>• Provide more prevention services to children and families by strengthening system capacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create health-promoting schools</li> <li>• Give children and adolescents opportunities to develop skills and build confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give children and parents the knowledge and skills to make healthy choices</li> <li>• Make healthy choices easier</li> </ul>
<b>STRATEGIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Integrate</b> wellness into government programming, planning and decision-making.</li> <li>✓ Work in <b>partnership</b> within and between governments and with other sectors to achieve gains.</li> <li>✓ Recognize <b>Yukon successes and innovation</b> in promoting wellness and inspiring others to take action.</li> <li>✓ Work through <b>national forums</b> to coordinate and enhance national efforts to support child and family wellness.</li> <li>✓ <b>Monitor and report</b> on progress, and promote the use of data and other forms of evidence in planning.</li> </ul>		

# Introduction

**Y**ukon parents want to raise healthy, happy children. We want our children to be safe and to have experiences and opportunities that allow them to make the most of their strengths and talents.

All Yukoners recognize the importance of preparing today's children to be tomorrow's adults. We want them to grow up to be hard-working, caring adults who contribute to the quality of community life and to Yukon's social and economic prosperity.

Rising rates of chronic diseases are threatening these dreams. Chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, depression, diabetes, and chronic lung disease, are on the rise. Conditions like high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes, which used to emerge in middle age, are now being diagnosed in young adults. Too many adolescents suffer from depression.

More and more Canadian adults and children, including Yukoners, are becoming overweight or obese due to many factors including what and how much we eat, how active we are, and how much sleep we get.

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*Care about all the children as they are all together going to be the next generation of adults.*

On-line survey respondent

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Obesity is a risk factor for many chronic diseases. It is an early warning sign of health problems down the road.

If these trends continue, more people will live more years with a chronic disease. The long-term health of today's children, and their ability to participate in the workforce and the civic and volunteer activities that build and sustain strong vibrant communities are under threat. But it doesn't have to be this way.

About 80 per cent of chronic diseases and 40-50 per cent of cancers can be prevented if we prevent the common risk factors

- Unhealthy eating
- Inactivity and sedentary behaviour
- Tobacco use
- Harmful use of alcohol

Stress also plays a role in the occurrence and progression of some chronic diseases.

This plan focuses on preventing illness and injuries, and promoting well-being. The evidence is clear: Lifelong health, learning and success in life begin in childhood, and are shaped by the social and physical environments in which children and adolescents live, learn, play and work.

This plan

- combines the science of well-being with what we heard and learned from Yukon people through meetings, interviews, an on-line survey, and specific wellness projects

- adopts a strengths-based approach that builds on the diversity, creativity, and resourcefulness of Yukon people, organizations, and communities
- commits to practical, realistic steps that can be taken in the next few years to make a difference in the lives of children and their families, and
- provides a roadmap to guide future actions.

Improving the well-being of Yukon children and families is a goal and a responsibility that all individuals, communities and sectors can embrace. Government plays an important role, but cannot do it alone.

The Department of Health and Social Services spearheaded this planning project, and many of the actions identified in this

plan fall within the Department's services and programs. But many influences on health – like recreation or safety on roadways and in workplaces - lie outside the health sector and with other Yukon Government departments.

Other levels of government, non-governmental organizations, businesses, faith communities and service clubs all play a role in promoting well-being. Examples of this work are highlighted later in this report.

We hope that this plan will spark new ways of thinking, and a desire to work in partnership with government and across sectors to broaden and deepen the positive impact we can have on children, youth and their families. Let's continue the momentum, and make wellness contagious.

## Wellness is more than working out and eating apples

Wellness is more than simply not being sick. Many people agree that wellness includes physical activity, healthy eating and smoke-free living, but know that it's so much more. No definition is perfect, but here is one that we used.

***Wellness is a positive state of feeling good and functioning well that enables individuals to achieve their full potential, enjoy quality of life, and contribute positively to their communities.***

Wellness has many dimensions which reflect the breadth and depth of human experience – from taking care of our bodies and emotions to lifelong learning, spending time productively, having a sense of purpose, and most importantly, nurturing and sustaining relationships that are deeply satisfying, supportive and fun!

The dimensions of wellness interact in complex and complementary ways. The balance between dimensions can shift as life circumstances and opportunities change. Strength in one dimension can offset challenges in another, and activities that promote wellness in one area often have a positive impact on other dimensions. This holistic approach to wellness promotes physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, occupational and social well-being in the places where we live, learn, work and play.

## How are our children doing?

**M**ost Yukon children and most families do well, but many struggle and still others fare poorly. There is room to improve health behaviours and health outcomes.

Yukon students are at least as active and eat as many fruits and vegetables as other Canadian students. But being like other Canadians isn't good enough. Few students in Yukon or in Canada meet recommended guidelines when it comes to activity, healthy eating, or screen time. Similar to other Canadians, about one in four male students and one in six female students in Yukon are overweight or obese. Children who are overweight become overweight adults.

Cannabis use, tobacco use, binge drinking, emotional and inter-personal problems are significant concerns in Yukon, particularly among rural students.

Lifelong health is strongly influenced by education. Too many of our children are not ready to learn when they enter kindergarten, and only two out of three high school students feel connected to school. Graduation rates are lower among First Nations, than non-First Nations, students.

The percentage of lone parent families in Yukon is higher than the Canadian average. About 40 per cent of these households struggle to meet their family's nutritional needs, and about 30 per cent have trouble paying for school supplies and extra-curricular activities.



Factors like income, education, and social status have a big influence on health. In general, people with more education, higher incomes, and greater social status enjoy better health and live longer. A snapshot of how well our children are doing shows gaps in health and learning outcomes and opportunities for lower income families, rural residents and First Nations children (see *On the Path Together: Supporting Documents*).

Improving the health of children, youth and families requires particular attention to closing the wellness gap between the most and least healthy.

# Connecting the dots: From childhood to chronic disease

**R**esearch has identified how experiences and environments in childhood and adolescence lead to increased risk of chronic disease later in life. Two main influences informed the development of the Wellness Plan: **toxic stress**, and the impact of **modern living**.

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Brain development begins in the womb, continues through adolescence, and is mostly complete by age 25.

The brain's architecture is built in stages through everyday experiences and interactions with caregivers, and each stage of development depends on what came before.

Brain circuits and connections that are used get strengthened; those that aren't die off.

**Anything that changes the brain changes who we are and who we will become.**

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## 1. Toxic stress in childhood

Beginning at birth and right through adolescence, all children and young people need at least one relationship with a supportive adult. Supportive relationships help children grow confident and competent, gain independence, and achieve their full potential.

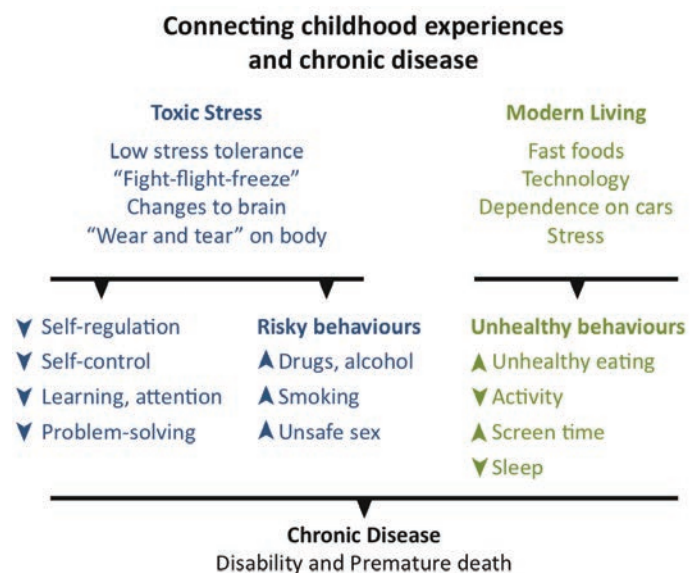
Babies are born completely dependent on the adults in their lives to meet their basic needs, including the need to be safe and secure. Through everyday interactions, caring, responsive parents and other adults provide safety, security, comfort, and protection, enabling children to explore the world around them and gain more independence as they grow and develop.

For all children some stress is both inevitable and necessary for healthy development. But high levels of stress throughout childhood that are not relieved or buffered by a caring adult can be "toxic." Child abuse or neglect, or exposure to extreme poverty, domestic violence, alcohol abuse or mental illness in the home can all be sources of "toxic stress."

During the first three years of life when the brain is developing rapidly, toxic stress can change the brain's architecture, chemistry and connections. Toxic stress strengthens the brain circuits responsible for the "fight-flight-or freeze" response and disrupts the development of other parts of the brain that are responsible for emotional regulation and impulse control, attachment, learning, and memory.

These disruptions to brain development interfere with healthy development, learning, and ability to develop positive relationships with peers. Toxic stress also increases risk behaviours. It is not surprising that older children and young people who are exposed to toxic stress may turn to drugs, alcohol, tobacco, overeating and risky sex for comfort or short-term relief. In the long run, these behaviours further increase the risk of chronic disease later in life.

In addition, an over-active “fight-flight-or freeze” response system can lead to more frequent and more intense stress reactions to everyday challenges and frustrations. “Wear and tear” on the parts of the body responsible for heart rate, blood pressure, blood sugar levels and the immune response sets the stage for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression and other health problems down the road.



## Protecting children

Toxic stress can be buffered and the effects repaired by supportive, responsive relationships with caring adults.

Children are remarkably resilient provided that they have at least one adult who “has their back.”

If parents are unable to provide this consistent response, other adults including extended family members, neighbours, teachers, coaches, spiritual advisors and others can either support parents directly, or be a model, mentor or ally to that child.

Research also shows that opportunities to learn, stretch, and experience success, forge positive relationships with peers, and engage in community service can buffer the impact of high levels of stress that cannot be prevented.

So practically speaking, what can we do?

- ✓ Give all kids a **good start in life**, beginning with a healthy pregnancy
- ✓ **Support all parents** to do the best for their children by providing information and guidance on parenting and healthy child development
- ✓ Offer **help early** to parents who need more support
- ✓ Keep children and adolescents engaged in **learning and school**
- ✓ Support young people to develop **confidence, competence and connection** through activities that ignite their passion, such as sports and recreation, cultural activities, visual and performing arts, and social justice activities



## 2. Modern living

Every day we make hundreds of decisions that affect our health – like what to eat and how much, whether to take the stairs or elevator, what time to go to bed, or how many beers to drink. Many of these decisions are made mindlessly, out of habit and reflect our preference for immediate rewards. Our biology, emotions, knowledge and surroundings all play into our decisions. The cumulative effect of these moment-to-moment, day-after-day decisions increases our risk for chronic disease.

**Humans are wired to survive when food is scarce or not readily available.** Eating large amounts of foods high in fat and sugar, and conserving energy help people survive in times of uncertainty. Modern living wreaks havoc with this survival strategy. We are biologically wired to eat too much, too often and with little or no effort in a world where food is plentiful and easy to obtain. Our bodies were built for survival as hunter-gatherers, not survival in the modern world.

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### Weighing in on daily decisions

Each day we make almost 300 decisions about food – whether to eat or skip breakfast, have toast or cereal, one serving or two, and so on throughout the day.

Decisions that result in an extra 100 calories per day – like having a can of pop – add up to about 10 lbs of weight over the course of the year.

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**Modern living makes unhealthy eating and physical inactivity too easy.** Our homes and communities are set up for convenience, making it difficult to make healthy choices. Convenience foods – whether fast foods or ready-to-serve microwaveable meals – seem to make sense for families who have too much to do and too little time. Vending machines make sugar-sweetened beverages and snack foods easy to buy in schools, workplaces, and public spaces. Communities designed for cars impact our ability to walk from home to school or work. Modern conveniences from snow blowers to washing machines and dryers take physical activity out of daily living.

Many pre-packaged convenience and fast foods are engineered with just the “right” amount of **fat, sugar, and salt** to light up the reward centres of our brains. The “right” amount almost always means more salt, fat, sugar and calories than foods prepared from scratch.

More of the calories we consume come from beverages. Although pop is often seen as the main culprit, fruit cocktails, iced teas, specialty coffees, energy drinks and vitamin water can also have high levels of sugar. These calories don’t meet our nutrition needs – they are just extra calories.

Reliance on pre-packaged, convenience foods has resulted in a **loss of food knowledge and skills**, from shopping to food preparation. New skills are needed to understand and use the information on nutrition labels to make good choices for ourselves and our children.

Research also demonstrates the **role of marketing** on consumer habits. Increasingly children are the targets of direct marketing of food products. Ninety per cent of television advertisements shown during programming for young children promote foods that are high in fat, sugar, salt or calories.

Children under the age of 12 years are not yet able to tell the difference between facts and sales pitches, but they are able to influence the foods their parents buy. Children who watch TV food advertisements eat more snacks, and are less likely to have a healthy weight.

**Technology** also plays a big role in the recent changes brought on by modern living. We eat more when we watch TV, and iPhones, computers, and other electronics in the bedroom interfere with sleep. Children and adolescents who get too little sleep are more likely to be overweight.



## Making healthy choices easier

We can't turn back the clock on modern living, but we can learn how to live well in the modern world. Evidence shows that we can

- ✓ Provide people with **information** and opportunities to develop the **skills** needed to make healthier choices for themselves and children in their care
- ✓ Draw on the power of **social support** and positive **peer pressure** to make healthy choices the norm
- ✓ Set up **physical environments** so that healthy choices are easy to make.
- ✓ Use **policies and guidelines** to support healthy choices in publicly-funded programs and buildings (e.g., schools, recreational centres)

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*It is a strain and stressor to monitor and limit access to these things [TV programming, iPods, computer games] that my child wants to do as much as possible. It's exhausting and a losing battle. If there wasn't so much mass marketed junk food and fast food, again, exhausting to stay on top of and try to limit.*

On-line survey respondent

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## *What about personal responsibility?*

Too many of us over-eat, smoke, drink too much and spend too much time in front of a screen. Where does personal responsibility fit in when it comes to making healthy choices?

### **Facts and fear alone don't work**

People are far from rational when it comes to making decisions in life. If facts and fear worked, few people would still be smokers. Communicating about health risks is difficult – many don't understand the concept of risk, or can't apply it to themselves. Most people, and especially adolescents, are more persuaded by information on health benefits than health risks.

### **Make a plan**

Both evidence and experience demonstrate that people over-estimate willpower, and under-estimate the value of a plan to make, and sustain, change. Willpower is like a reservoir that gets drawn down over the course of the day with each temptation that is resisted. There can be little left by end of day to sustain commitments to change. Removing temptations and having a specific plan for making small changes will result in greater personal success.

The way forward is clear:  
We need to take personal responsibility for our health, and we need to create the conditions which encourage and support healthy choices.

### **It's about who you know**

People are social animals. We follow the lead of others — the people around us influence how we think and feel, and what we do. For example, depression and happiness can spread through social networks just as drinking and abstinence can spread. Social networks establish and reinforce norms and values, share advice and information, and influence motivation and behaviour. It's much easier for people to eat better, be more active, quit smoking, and moderate their use of alcohol when the people they hang out with do the same.

### **The “nudge” factor**

Smoking, activity, eating and substance use are not simply the result of consciously-made personal choices. People are exquisitely sensitive to environmental cues, and even small changes in the environment can have a powerful effect on behaviour. For example, simply switching from a 12” to a 10” dinner plate reduces the amount we eat by about 25%.

On a much larger scale, environments can “nudge” us in the direction of positive behaviours. Healthy and affordable food in stores, restaurants and cafeterias make healthy eating possible and attractive. Tax increases on tobacco and alcohol products decrease use among young people.

# Pathways to wellness

This plan provides a roadmap on what we can do to improve the health and well-being of Yukon children and families. It is based on:

- the evidence of what works when it comes to promoting lifelong health, well-being and success;
- the ideas, insights and experiences of Yukoners which that were gathered in meetings with stakeholders from all sectors, interviews with individuals, an on-line survey, and work on specific projects; and
- Yukon's strengths, successes and readiness to act.

There is reason to be optimistic about the future of well-being in Yukon. Throughout the territory, individuals and families, community organizations, service clubs, all levels of government, businesses and faith communities are taking action on wellness. We are pleased to highlight examples of this good work in the pages that follow.

This plan identifies three pathways to wellness, and sets out next steps that the Department of Health and Social Services and other Yukon Government departments will take that are practical, realistic and achievable in the short-term, taking into account the current fiscal environment.

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*[Ideas on how we can raise happy, healthy children and support parents include] Elder/youth programming, especially elders who are active, on the land activities, build the relationship, passing of stories, teaching respect of others.*

On-line survey respondent

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The plan also identifies how we will ensure that work to improve child and family wellness continues to develop and respond to changing circumstances and opportunities.

We hope that the plan will spark new ideas on how we can work together to build on the interest and momentum we see all around us.



# PATHWAY 1: Getting a good start

**T**he foundation for lifelong health, learning and success in life is built in the early years (pre-natal to age 6). A healthy pregnancy, loving, responsive parents and other caregivers, safe stimulating environments, and good nutrition are the keys to healthy child, and brain, development.

This pathway focuses on increasing positive experiences and environments to prevent exposure to toxic levels of stress, and to buffer children from the effects of stress that cannot be prevented. Moment-to-moment, day-to-day experiences with responsive, engaged parents and other caregivers allow young children to form attachments, explore their world, learn, and grow.

Supporting parents to be sensitive and responsive is the single most important benefit we can give the next generation of children.

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*Commit to children first as a priority in all community programs – by creating a lens – will this activity or event contribute to all of our community children feeling welcome, safe and provide support and learning to their family.*

On-line survey respondent

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## What the research says works

The ingredients for giving children a good start in life can be found in Yukon. Research from around the world has identified effective ways to improve child well-being, including:

- ✓ Good pre- and post-natal care, including prenatal nutrition programs, support for women to avoid drinking and smoking during pregnancy, breastfeeding supports
- ✓ Well baby clinics, immunization programs, screening for parental depression and child development, and referral to more intensive supports and services for children and families in need
- ✓ The basics – food, shelter, physical and emotional safety
- ✓ Quality early learning and care programs
- ✓ Information, consistent messages, and programs to increase knowledge and skills about child development and parenting
- ✓ Places where families can meet, socialize, swap ideas, support each other, play, have fun
- ✓ Communities where everyone looks out for children and helps families raise children
- ✓ Employment benefits and practices that allow parents to balance work and family responsibilities
- ✓ Access to services to assist parents who are unable to provide consistent parenting due to addictions, mental health problems, and domestic violence



## Yukon is on the right path

Yukon parents, extended families, friends and communities work hard to provide nurturing, stimulating and safe homes for children.

The territorial, federal and First Nation governments deliver or fund many services for children and parents, including public health services, programs such as the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program and Healthy Babies, Healthy Moms and interdisciplinary training to identify risks to healthy pregnancies (e.g., alcohol use).

The Yukon government, First Nations governments, Yukon College, the federally-funded Partners for Children, early childhood educators and day home and day care operators work to make quality child care and early learning services available to families.

Non-profit organizations like Many Rivers Counselling and Support Services and the Child Development Centre offer services and programs to increase parents' knowledge, skills and confidence. The Family Literacy Centre in Whitehorse and the Hope Centre in Ross River are great examples of family-friendly spaces where families and young children can read and play.

The Yukon, First Nations and municipal governments, churches, and other community groups fund or provide a variety of social and recreational programs for families with young children, many of which are free or low-cost.

Maternity benefits are available through the federal government. Many employers offer flex-hours, or parental leave benefits, to help employees meet their family obligations.



### **Objective 1.1** Empower all parents to do their best for their children in the early years

Parents are their children's first loves and first teachers, and continue to be the most important influence in their children's lives even through adolescence. Parents want to do the right thing, but some lack knowledge of child development, the skills of positive parenting, or confidence in their ability to raise their children.

All Yukon parents can benefit from easy and quick access to reliable, evidence-based

information on child development and positive parenting, opportunities to learn and practice responsive parenting skills, and parent-to-parent support.

Experts in child development recommend programs and services that are open and accessible to all children and families, but provide extra support to families who face greater barriers.

## Next steps

### Make clear, reliable and practical information on healthy child and brain development more accessible to parents.

- Enhance information on healthy child development on the **Pathways to Wellness website** to create a virtual toolkit for parents of young children with links to other government websites for information on services to children and families. (HSS)
- Develop or adapt public awareness materials that emphasize key practices for **raising healthy children** and standardize distribution to parents. (HSS)
- Provide practical information to moms, dads and other family members to promote **breastfeeding** and to address factors that might hinder breastfeeding initiation and continuation, beginning in the first pre-natal visit. Provide extra support in the first six weeks after birth. (HSS)
- Develop and promote standard messages on **healthy child development** for use by physicians, nurses and other service providers. (HSS)
- Continue promotion of **pre-school oral health**. (HSS)

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*Make it a right to work part-time  
for parents of pre-schoolers,  
maybe even school-aged kids.  
Seems like a strange idea? So did  
maternity leave at one time.*

On-line survey respondent

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### Provide parents with skills, tools, and opportunities to support their children's development.

- Encourage ongoing support and promotion of the **Imagination Library**. (HSS)
- Identify and provide targeted **support on breastfeeding** initiation and continuation to specific communities or populations in Yukon. (HSS)
- Provide **telehealth consultations** on breastfeeding to rural moms and families requiring additional support. (HSS)
- Examine and identify evidence-based **parenting programs** that can be delivered effectively throughout the Yukon, including train the trainer programs. (HSS)
- Partner with Education to expand **Learning Together** to more schools and communities by assisting with outreach to parents and families. (HSS, Ed)
- Continue to work with NGO partners funded by HSS, to provide parents with information, tools, and opportunities to build and practice **parenting skills** and develop **positive peer relations** with other parents. (HSS)
- Continue to support affordable, accessible **recreation** for parents, children and families of all abilities. (CS, HSS)
- Identify opportunities for enhancing **early literacy** through the Yukon Literacy Strategy (in development) and continue programming designed to promote early literacy. (Ed)
- Promote safe choices when it comes to travelling with children through the Yukon **Child Car Seat Safety Program**. (HPW)

## Objective 1.2 Identify children and families who require more support or referral to specialized services as early as possible

The brain develops very rapidly in the early years, and there are many sensitive periods when important sensory and cognitive functions develop. It's important to identify problems and delays, and offer help to children and parents as early as possible when interventions are more effective, and the impact on future development can be minimized.

*Offer people the skills and supports they need to parent for prevention, to raise competent healthy children who contribute to community.*

Most mothers and young children have frequent contact with doctors, community health nurses and other providers during the early years. Routine screening during check-ups or immunization clinics is a great opportunity for service providers to engage all parents in conversations about their child's health and development. Screening also allows providers to identify and refer children and families to specialized services where needed, and protect the health of moms and babies by helping families plan future healthy pregnancies.

On-line survey respondent

Parents of children with disabilities face the same challenges as other parents but, in addition, experience the added stress and difficulties associated with meeting their child's needs and accessing help so that their child can achieve their potential. These families need timely and easy access to a range of family-friendly services and supports.

### Next steps

#### Enhance use of best practice and clinical practice guidelines on screening, assessment, and early intervention in public health, primary care, and allied fields.

- Introduce **Nutri-Step screening** at the 18-month immunization visit as a tool to discuss healthy eating with parents and to refer families to clinical dietitians if needed. (HSS)
- Explore the use of other **screening tools** that provide information to parents and prompt discussion. (HSS)
- Seek opportunities to review parental and child development **screening practices** used by HSS, physicians and NGO partners to ensure screening is used most effectively. (HSS)

#### Make specialized services and supports available to families and children who need them.

- Continue to provide in-Yukon **assessment and early intervention** of children with developmental delays including Autism Spectrum Disorder and Complex Needs, through NGO partners. (HSS)
- Continue to **prioritize services** such as detox and addictions treatment for pregnant women and parents of young children and ensure that the public and referral sources are aware of these priorities. (HSS)

### Objective 1.3 Provide more prevention services to children and families by strengthening system capacity

Every contact with a health or social service provider is an opportunity for prevention. Each Yukon community has a slightly different mix of services and supports to young children and their families that are delivered in different settings by different providers, including doctors, nurses, social workers, First Nations family support workers, early childhood educators and others. Without coordination, there may be gaps, duplication, and inconsistency in the messages and guidance given to parents.

Improved coordination, communication, and cross-disciplinary training at the territorial level, and collaborative care teams at the community level, can improve the accessibility and quality of services provided.



### Next steps

#### Forge effective links between all providers offering services to children and families.

- Review and standardize **public health functions** provided by Community Nursing and identify opportunities to positively impact outcomes for children and families in partnership with other service providers. (HSS)
- Reinforce current practices and promote awareness and further implementation of the WHO Integrated 10 Steps Practice Outcome Indicators on **breastfeeding**. (HSS)
- Support coordination of services for families in **rural communities** by actively participating in effective interagency committees and collaborating where appropriate. (HSS)
- Develop a plan on the **Early Years** to guide coordinated activities by Yukon government. (HSS, Ed, WD)

#### Promote professional development and opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning.

- Provide the 18 Hour **Breastfeeding Education Course** to nurses and other service providers who work with breastfeeding mothers. (HSS)
- Work in partnership with other governments and community partners to coordinate regular **telehealth learning** opportunities for front-line service providers who are working with families throughout Yukon. (HSS)
- Explore community needs, interests and opportunities for itinerant HSS workers and NGO partners with **expertise in child development** to share their knowledge with other service providers while visiting rural communities. (HSS)

## PATHWAY 2: Raising kids who flourish

**T**his pathway focuses on the opportunities, relationships and skills children and youth need to lead healthy, productive lives. As children grow, their health and well-being are increasingly influenced by adults outside the family and peers.

Supportive relationships with other caring adults (including teachers, coaches, and mentors), positive peer networks, and opportunities to develop interests, skills and confidence are protective factors. They

- Protect kids from harm and buffer them from the effects of toxic stress;
- Promote and support positive behaviours (like physical activity, good social-emotional skills); and
- Reduce risky behaviours such as smoking, drinking, drug use and other high risk activities that contribute to chronic disease later in life.

Children and youth who are engaged in healthy productive activities with caring peers and adults who model social behaviours are more resilient, enjoy better physical and mental well-being, perform better in school, and contribute to their community.

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*It takes a community.  
A community culture which  
fosters well-being among  
children and services  
available in the community  
to assist families.*

On-line survey respondent

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### What the research says works

Yukon experience bears out the research from around the world that identifies what works to raise kids who flourish:

- ✓ Parents who are engaged in their children's learning, and schools that are welcoming and actively engage parents
- ✓ Schools that provide opportunities for students to learn and practice health behaviours, support positive relationships with teachers and other students, and meet the diverse learning needs of students
- ✓ Adult allies who work side-by-side young people and act as mentors
- ✓ After-school programs that provide opportunities to be active, eat healthy snacks, learn and socialize
- ✓ Opportunities to participate in sports and recreation, arts, cultural activities, and volunteer and community service in schools and the community
- ✓ Opportunities for young people to develop leadership and peer-to-peer support skills
- ✓ Employment opportunities that set clear expectations and provide training and feedback



## Yukon is on the right path

All levels of government, non-governmental organizations, the business sector, service organizations, and faith communities in Yukon create environments and provide opportunities that support the healthy development of school-aged children and young people.

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“Health is directly linked to educational achievement, quality of life and economic productivity. Research in both developing and developed countries demonstrates that school health programs can simultaneously reduce common health problems, increase the efficiency of the education system and advance public health, education and social and economic development in each nation.”

**World Health Organization**

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Since 2005, the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Education have participated in the national Joint Consortium on School Health, and work together to promote healthy schools.

Many schools provide a wider range of programs such as MAD (Music, Art and Drama), experiential science, culture camps, access to trade and technical training, and on-line learning opportunities to engage and meet the diverse learning needs and interests of students.

The Boys and Girls Club, B.Y.T.E. (Bringing Youth Towards Equality) and Recreation and Parks Association of Yukon promote positive youth development by providing or supporting quality after-school programs, and opportunities to develop youth leaders in communities throughout Yukon.

By partnering with First Nation governments, Yukon schools are celebrating, teaching and helping to preserve Yukon First Nation languages, traditional activities and culture.

Many businesses contribute funding and in-kind services and goods to support sports, recreation, and cultural activities, and provide part-time and summer job opportunities for young people.



## Objective 2.1      Create health-promoting schools

School health is not just about what happens in classrooms. A “whole school approach” shapes the social and physical environment, policies, and partnerships with parents and community agencies to promote health in an integrated, holistic way.

Successful health-promoting schools actively reach out beyond the walls of the school into the community, and foster relationships and create a school environment that welcomes and engages people of all ages.

Because kids spend the majority of their waking hours in school, schools can and do have a direct influence on health outcomes and behaviours, including physical activity, healthy eating, and social-emotional well-being.

Health and education are inextricably linked. Healthy students are better learners, and people with more formal education have better health and live longer.

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*Better integration between the school and the community, with activities aimed at both parents and children (à la Whole Child Program).*

On-line survey respondent

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## Next steps

### Take an integrated and holistic approach to promoting healthy schools.

- Finalize the SHARE (**Sexual Health and Relationships Education**) resource for Grades 4-7 and develop partnerships to implement this resource. (HSS)
- Develop a plan and priorities for promoting healthy schools using the four pillars of the **Comprehensive School Health Framework** developed by the Joint Consortium on School Health. (HSS, Ed)
- Continue inclusive education philosophy, including supporting **positive mental health** and **social-emotional learning**. (Ed)
- Continue to support **Health and Career Education** (HACE) learning outcomes in Yukon schools and identify resources that could complement delivery of the HACE program. (Ed)
- Evaluate the impact of **school attendance** initiatives funded through a partnership between Victoria Gold and Yukon Education and continue work with partners such as HSS and Victoria Gold to increase attendance rates. (Ed)
- Continue to promote healthy respectful relationships and offer presentations to students, teachers, parents and service providers on **gender stereotyping** and the resulting interpersonal violence. (WD)

## Objective 2.2

### Give children and adolescents opportunities to develop skills and build confidence

Children and young people benefit when they have opportunities to learn, contribute, excel and shape the decisions that affect them under the guidance of positive adult role models. Opportunities to discover and develop passions, and showcase talents in sports and recreation, performing and visual arts, social justice, cultural traditions and academics help all kids thrive.

Supporting young people in these ways also means supporting the adults in their lives. Adult allies allow young people to take increasing responsibility for their lives and their circumstances as they mature physically, emotionally, and intellectually. This builds competence, confidence and connections with others.

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*It (travelling) really teaches me or helps me discover what my values are, and who I want to be as a person. I think it's really important to experience countries first hand because it gives you just a broader view of yourself... I think the idea that there's so much more to this world than we know about is really exciting.*

Yukon young person, Passions Video Project

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## Next steps

### Support strong, supportive relationships between young people and adults.

- Continue to engage, train, and support **adult allies**, with emphasis on rural adult allies. (HSS)
- Explore possibilities with NGO partners for expanding **parenting supports** to parents of school-aged children and youth within existing resources. (HSS)
- Include **parenting education and support** in community-based prevention, out-patient, and in-patient alcohol and drug programming. (HSS)
- Facilitate **networking** among youth-serving organizations to foster information-sharing, skill-building, and peer support. (YD)
- Increase awareness of resources and opportunities for children and youth by making relevant information available on the **Youth Directory** website. (YD)



**Provide young people with opportunities to obtain information, develop skills, confidence and competence and exercise their maturing ability to make decisions.**

- Continue to offer opportunities for skill development and creative expression in programs provided to **young people at risk**. (HSS)
- Increase focus on **youth engagement and positive youth development** as an effective strategy for increasing positive, health-promoting behaviours and decreasing risk. (HSS, YD)
- Embed **information on the risks** of smoking, drinking, unsafe sexual activity and other risk behaviours into positive youth development activities across the department. (HSS)
- Look for opportunities to introduce young people and adult allies to the principles and practices that support **mental well-being** in positive youth development activities. (HSS)
- Continue funding and other efforts to engage, train and empower youth and develop **youth leadership skills**, with emphasis on rural youth. (YD, CS)
- Continue to recognize youth leadership through the **Outstanding Youth Achievement Award**. (YD)
- Provide a broader range of **learning opportunities to rural students**, including experiential and land-based programming,

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*Whenever you can have that moment when you are really effective and that you achieved your goals, it's a pretty empowering feeling because you've put so much effort into it.*

**Yukon young person, Passions Video Project**

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access to applied skills and trades training, enhanced use of technology, and on-line learning opportunities. (Ed)

- Continue to reflect diverse learning needs in education and program pathways by offering individualized **specialty programs** reflecting the needs and interests of children and youth. (Ed)
- Develop a comprehensive plan to address **bullying behaviours** among school-aged children. (Ed)

**Support young people to take healthy risks and reduce risk behaviours.**

- Promote awareness of ways to reduce harms associated with **drug use and risky sexual practices** and reduce barriers to accessing information and testing for communicable diseases. (HSS)
- Continue to promote the “Code of Practice for Employers of Young or New Workers” and provide workshop presentations to high school students throughout Yukon on **young workers’** rights, responsibilities and making safe choices in the workplace. (YWCHSB)
- Strengthen awareness and help shape **attitudes about safety** among children by promoting the educational kit developed for use in Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms,

and adapt and promote similar materials for students in other elementary grades. (YWCHSB)

- Continue to promote **road safety practices** for motorists, vehicle passengers, cyclists and pedestrians by providing information, education and resources to young people and the general public. (HPW)
- Increase access to resources, tools and reporting to combat **online exploitation and bullying** of children in Yukon by continuing the public awareness partnership with Canadian Centre for Child Protection. (Justice)

## PATHWAY 3: Healthy living for life

**T**he rates of overweight and obesity are rising among Canadians of all ages, including children and youth. Unhealthy weights are an early warning sign for many chronic diseases. Physical inactivity, poor nutrition and unhealthy eating habits, too little sleep, and stress all contribute to unhealthy weights.

Children establish habits early in life and adults play an important role in making healthy decisions on behalf of children and modeling healthy behaviour. Children, young people and parents need reliable information and opportunities to build skills that support healthy behaviour and decisions.

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*Stay active, turn off the screens and have great peer groups who are active – model activity.*

On-line survey respondent

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### What the research says works

Our experience in promoting healthy living in Yukon bears out research findings from around the world about what works:

- ✓ Accessible information in a variety of formats on how to make healthier choices
- ✓ After-school programs that provide healthy snacks and opportunities to be physically active
- ✓ Opportunities for children, young people and adults to learn food preparation skills
- ✓ Safe playgrounds, recreational facilities, cycling paths and access to walking trails year round
- ✓ Access to nutritious affordable food in stores, school cafeterias and communities
- ✓ Policies and guidelines that guide foods served or sold in schools, recreational facilities, and community centres

- ✓ Family-friendly events and programs that encourage healthy living, and are affordable and available at times that are convenient to parents





## Yukon is on the right path

Many Yukon families, especially in rural Yukon, have gardens, fish, hunt, and harvest off the land.

The Department of Health and Social Services and Recreation and Parks Association of Yukon (RPAY) have both developed public awareness and media campaigns to promote healthy living. The Pathways to Wellness website, [www.yukonwellness.ca](http://www.yukonwellness.ca), provides up-to-date, evidence-based information for Yukoners of all ages.

The Department of Community Services provides funding to organizations and communities to support sports, recreation and active living programming and recreational facilities in all Yukon communities. And, the Department of Economic Development through the Community Development Fund provides funding to communities to promote community wellness.

The Yukon Renewed Active Living Strategy includes a focus on the after-school time period in rural Yukon communities. After-school programs address boredom, reduce screen time and unhealthy snacking, and support parents who are employed full-time.

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*Encourage outdoor activities for children and families. Bring back the playground. Go camping. Teach people how to go camping. Make equipment available for families who can't afford it. Have Family Fun Days. Use your imagination.*

On-line survey respondent

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Many First Nations governments have invested in community gardens and community greenhouses. The food they produce is often given to pregnant and single moms, people with chronic disease, elders, and school food programs.

Smoke-free public places, alcohol-free community events, pop-free schools, taxes on tobacco and alcohol products, and other similar activities help create environments that encourage and support healthy behaviours.

### Objective 3.1 Empower children, parents and other caregivers with the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy choices

Providing opportunities for children, youth, parents and other adults to acquire the knowledge they need is the first step towards enabling people of all ages to make healthier choices. In the areas of eating and nutrition, this includes a basic understanding of nutritional information, skills to prepare foods that taste good, and strategies to stretch a limited food budget.

Strategies to increase knowledge and skills about healthy eating, physical activity and sleep also provide opportunities to integrate information about behaviours like smoking, drinking and drug use which undermine healthy choices and contribute to accidents and injuries among young people.

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*Healthy parents raise healthy children. Healthy in body, soul and spirit. Parents need to be taught how to do this. This will start a cycle of ongoing success.*

On-line survey respondent

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### Next steps

#### Educate children, families and the general public on healthy living.

- Continue to support the **Pathways to Wellness website** as the go-to site for evidence-based, plain language and practical information on healthy living for people of all ages. (HSS)
- Continue to **engage and educate** children, students, families and the general public on healthy eating, smoking cessation, positive mental health, alcohol and drugs, and other wellness topics through a variety of means, including public awareness campaigns, presentations, workshops and print and web-based information. (HSS)
- Evaluate and use **lessons learned** from *From the ground up*, *Food for thought*, and *Kids in the Kitchen* to guide future program planning. (HSS)
- Encourage YG departments and other public and private sector employers to include authoritative, evidence-based sources of wellness information in **staff newsletters** and bulletins. (HSS)

#### Integrate information and skill-building into existing programs and services.

- Pursue opportunities, including national funding and multi-jurisdictional partnerships, to increase **food knowledge and skills** of young people through after school programming, life-skills training, school programs, family-based programs. (HSS)
- Develop and promote **standard messages on healthy living** that front-line service providers from different sectors (e.g., health, social service and recreation) can provide to clients/patients/participants. (HSS, CS)
- Educate and train front-line service providers and leaders in community recreation and elementary schools to gain a common understanding and ability to deliver **physical literacy** components within their programs and classrooms. (CS)

## Objective 3.2

### Make healthy choices easier

The choices we make are shaped by the choices we have. People of all ages are more likely to make healthy choices when these choices are accessible, available and affordable, and unhealthy choices are less available. Right now it's the other way around in too many of the environments in which we live, work, learn and play.

Even small changes to the environment can “nudge” people in the direction of healthier choices. Guidelines can assist people who run programs and businesses to offer a “menu of options” that includes and promotes healthy food, drinks and activities.

Healthy choices are easier to make when stores, restaurants, and cafeterias serve and sell healthy foods in healthy portion sizes, and public spaces encourage physical activity through parks, trails, school gyms, outdoor rinks, and recreational centres.

Paying attention to the after-school period is particularly important when it comes to children and young people. This is the time when many children and youth may be unsupervised, and engage in unhealthy eating, sedentary activities like video games, and risky behaviours.

## Next steps

### Provide healthy food and decrease access to unhealthy food choices.

- Promote **food guidelines** for programs serving children and youth. (HSS)
- Complete work with government and community partners to improve **Healthy Food and Beverages** served or sold in **recreational** settings. (HSS, CS)
- Complete work with government and community partners to roll out **Healthy Beginnings** messages (healthy eating, activity, and screen time for pre-school children) and Nutritional Guidelines for child care programs. (HSS, CS)

### Make healthy choices more accessible and affordable.

- Continue to support the **Kids Recreation Fund**. (HSS)
- Continue to support **school breakfast** programs. (HSS)
- Address and provide clarity on the use of **wild game** in meals for children, youth and others attending child care and other community programs when amending food regulations under the *Public Health and Safety Act*. (HSS)
- Work with colleagues across all levels of government to address issues related to food quality and accessibility that are best carried out at a **national level** (e.g., sodium content of foods, nutrition labeling, marketing to children). (HSS)

### Take a holistic and integrated approach to community wellness to maximize results.

- Amplify the impact of the **Yukon Renewed Active Living Strategy** by partnering and maintaining the strategic focus on capacity building in rural Yukon and programming in the after-school time period. (HSS, CS)
- Continue to raise awareness about the **benefits of nature** and active living, and promote access to trails and parks. (CS)
- Explore opportunities for **schools to become hubs** for a broad range of community services. (Ed)
- Develop **communications materials** for school personnel and parents that focus on the promotion of positive health. (Ed)



# Strategies for moving forward

**W**e all have a role when it comes to promoting, protecting, and improving health and well-being. Government has specific roles and responsibilities that can influence well-being on many levels. This section identifies five cross-cutting strategies that Health and Social Services will pursue to embed “wellness” into the business of government.

## 1. Integrate wellness into government programming, planning and decision-making.

The Department of Health and Social Services, as the sponsor of the Wellness Plan, can further integrate activities that promote well-being and prevent illness and injury into the services and programs it provides or funds. It can also prompt and assist other YG departments to integrate wellness into their core businesses where it makes sense to do so. We can build on the efforts that many departments are already making to promote well-being.

### Actions

- Build on the HSS Departmental **strategic objective** to integrate evidence-based health and wellness promotion activities by ensuring that activities to support this objective are identified in branch and unit plans. (HSS)
- Look for opportunities when working with clients to encourage and use group activities and **peer support** models where appropriate, to capitalize on the power of social support. (HSS)
- Embed **positive messages** to influence health attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in social marketing campaigns. (HSS)
- Create a **resource** that CDF, HIF, YIF and other funding programs can provide to applicants that sets out effective ways to promote individual and community well-being. (HSS)
- Continue to train HSS staff on **cultural competence**, drawing on local resources and courses informed by knowledge shared by Yukon First Nations. (HSS)
- Develop an **assessment tool** that can be used to identify ways to infuse evidence-based wellness practices into new initiatives, policies and programs, beginning with submissions originating or reviewed by HSS. (HSS)
- Continue to review **CDF applications** from a wellness perspective and provide comments to Economic Development for consideration. (HSS, Ec Dev)



## 2. Work in **partnership** within government and with other sectors to achieve gains.

Strong, enduring partnerships and effective collaboration within government, between governments, and with the business, faith, non-profit and service sectors are critical to our success. We know that great things happen when we draw on the expertise, enthusiasm and energy of Yukon people, organizations and communities.

Working in partnerships brings new perspectives, knowledge, skills and resources to the table. Each partner also brings a different network of relationships that, when linked together, can greatly extend the reach of our efforts. More people involved in more and different ways builds momentum, helps build sustainability, and allows everyone to learn together.

### Actions

- Build **links with universities** and researchers by pursuing research and funding opportunities, and hosting practicum students. (HSS)
- Work with partners to coordinate and offer regular **telehealth learning** sessions on a variety of topics related to child development, parenting, positive youth development and healthy living, to front-line service providers working in Yukon communities. (HSS)
- Partner with Council of Yukon First Nations to develop **community-specific web-based health and social services calendars**, starting with three pilot sites. (HSS)
- Form a **Healthy Living Interdepartmental Committee** with HSS, CS and Education to coordinate and track implementation of Yukon plans and FPT commitments related to healthy eating and active living. (HSS, CS, Ed)
- Coordinate the development of a time-limited YG working group to share information on **food security**, scope YG interests and roles and identify possible next steps. (Env)



### 3. Recognize Yukon successes and innovation in promoting wellness and inspiring others to take action.

Positive examples of taking action on wellness, like positive emotions and experiences, inspire and spread. We have found many good examples of what is working well in Yukon today, and we know that there will be many more in the months and years to come.

When communities take action on their priorities, they use creativity and wisdom to find solutions that fit for their community. When it comes to promoting wellness, any starting place is a good one because one action leads to another, success breeds success, and pride grows with every step.

Recognizing successes and spreading good ideas help make wellness grow.

#### Actions

- Promote “**Stories that Inspire**” through websites, workshops, and distribution of the report. (HSS)
- Create a **Ministerial Award** of recognition for public achievements and innovation in promoting child and family wellness. (HSS)

### 4. Work through **national forums** to coordinate and enhance national efforts to support child and family wellness.

We can accomplish much at the community and territorial level, but some issues are better addressed on the national stage. Some issues— like nutrition labeling of products sold in grocery stores, the sodium content of convenience foods, or the regulation of marketing directed at children – are within the jurisdiction of the federal government. We can add Yukon’s voice to federal-provincial-territorial tables to support changes that will benefit all Canadians, including Yukoners.

We can also continue to work with other jurisdictions and national organizations on projects of mutual interest and common benefit. By virtue of their size, these organizations are able to contribute resources, expertise and linkages to universities and other partners needed for projects that Yukon would not be able to pursue on its own.

#### Actions

- Continue to participate in the **Joint Consortium on School Health**. (HSS, Ed)
- Actively participate on **Federal/Provincial/Territorial and national committees** to coordinate and enhance national initiatives that support child and family wellness (e.g., Curbing Childhood Obesity). (HSS)

**5. Monitor and report** on progress and promote the use of data and other forms of **evidence** in evaluation, planning and budgeting.

We need to continue to build an evidence base on the health of Yukon's children and families, and make this evidence available to the public in easy-to-read formats to increase awareness.

We also need to find practical, low cost ways to collect, use and disseminate information about what works when it comes to improving health and learning outcomes of children and families.

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*In a world where children are being increasingly influenced through social media, they need to be able to form strong, healthy attachments to several adults in their immediate communities.*

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On-line survey respondent

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## Actions

- Put in place a **method to track and report** on the actions taken by HSS to embed wellness into all program areas. (HSS)
- Adopt **evidence-based guidelines** developed by recognized experts to guide decision-making about new or enhanced programs (HSS)
- Report progress on child and family wellness to the public using the indicator framework set out in the **Kids Count!** report as a starting point. (HSS)
- Promote the **evaluation toolkit** for youth leadership in partnership with Youth Directorate. (HSS)
- Collect, share and report **population-level survey results** on the health and well-being of children such as Health Behaviours of School-aged Children survey (every 4 years) and Early Development Instrument (EDI), and coordinate plans to address issues arising from the data. (HSS, Ed)



## Staying on track

**W**ork to improve the well-being of children, youth and families is ongoing – this plan is a step along the way, not the end of our work. Making progress will require a sustained effort over time by many people walking in the same direction.

That's why, as part of the implementation of this plan, we have created some structures within Yukon government to keep the focus on wellness. Specifically:

- Health and Social Services will form an internal committee of managers to champion wellness and explore ways to further integrate wellness into the work of the department. This work will feed into annual departmental, branch and program planning.
- The interdepartmental Healthy Living Committee will coordinate activities on healthy eating, physical activity and related issues arising from the Renewed Active Living Strategy, Comprehensive School Health Framework and the Wellness Plan for Yukon's Children and Families.
- Health and Social Services will create an implementation plan to track progress on the actions identified in this plan.

In addition to tracking activities, it is essential that we measure whether our efforts are making a difference in the health and well-being of Yukon children and families.

In the short term, we can look at whether specific programs, services and actions to improve child and family well-being are meeting their objectives.

When it comes to overall well-being, however, there is no single indicator of success. A set of indicators is needed to reflect several dimensions of well-being. Practically speaking, the choice of indicators should also be based on factors such as the availability, reliability, and validity of specific measures, their cost and the ability to compare how well Yukon children and families are doing against other Canadians.

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*Evaluation doesn't have to be scary. With the methodologies provided, I realize that evaluation (and the evaluation process) is already helping my program set clear goals and expectations to benefit the needs of participants.*

**Participant in the Asking Questions that Matter workshop**

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The **Kids Count! Indicator Framework** was developed to support this plan and balances all of these considerations. It is based on a review of how other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world measure well-being, and consultation with Yukon government managers and directors. It identifies six domains of well-being, and indicators under each domain.

Health	Learning & Development	Safety & Security	Family Circumstances	Social Connection	Health Behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Birth weight</li> <li>• Breastfeeding</li> <li>• Immunization uptake</li> <li>• Sexually transmitted infections</li> <li>• Teen pregnancy</li> <li>• Self-rated health</li> <li>• Self-rated mental health</li> <li>• Emotional well-being</li> <li>• Emotional problems</li> <li>• Overweight &amp; obesity</li> <li>• Oral health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School readiness</li> <li>• School completion</li> <li>• Academic achievement</li> <li>• School attendance</li> <li>• School climate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Injuries</li> <li>• Injury risk behaviour</li> <li>• Helmet use</li> <li>• Bullying</li> <li>• Children in care</li> <li>• Neighbourhood safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family income</li> <li>• Food security</li> <li>• Material circumstances</li> <li>• Family demographics</li> <li>• Housing affordability</li> <li>• Children in transitional housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship with parents</li> <li>• Relationship with peers</li> <li>• Community belongingness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrition</li> <li>• Physical activity</li> <li>• Tobacco use</li> <li>• Alcohol use</li> <li>• Drug use</li> <li>• Sexual activity</li> <li>• Prosocial behaviour</li> <li>• Behavioural problems</li> <li>• Youth involvement in crime</li> </ul>

A snapshot of how Yukon children and families are doing using the **Kids Count! Framework** can be found in *On the Path Together: Supporting Documents*.

This framework will allow us to measure progress over time. Some of the measures are collected and reported annually (for example, immunization rates and school attendance). Other indicators (like physical activity and drug use) come from the Health Behaviours of School-Aged Children Survey and are only available every four years.

As one of the actions under **Strategies for moving forward**, the Department of Health and Social Services has committed to preparing a report to the public using the **Kids Count! Framework** every four years.

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*Parenthood needs some positive PR!  
I think parents are not aware that they are the number one influence on the success and well-being of their children. Putting that message out there in the public is an important first step to giving parents the recognition and gratitude that they deserve (and seldom receive) for raising the next generation.*

On-line survey respondent

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# On the path together

This report provides direction and the foundation for taking steps to give our kids the best life chances and to support their parents to make the most of opportunities to help their children do well. We highlight the opportunities that the Department of Health and Social Services has to embed prevention and promotion activities into the programs and services we deliver. But we will fall short of our hopes and dreams for Yukon children without the enthusiasm, insights and determination of all Yukoners. We cannot build a better future on our own.

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*Spend quality time each and every day with your children, even if it's only 5 minutes. Read a book, talk about your day and share your hopes and dreams.*

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On-line survey respondent

Children are raised by families and communities, not governments. And communities are the family of families. If we want to raise the bar when it comes to health, happiness and success of today's children and future generations, we must all step up to the plate.

## It's up to each of us!

Throughout the territory, **Yukon people** are taking action to improve the well-being of children and their families. We can spread health, hope and happiness, and make wellness contagious.

- ✓ Read , play, talk, and laugh with your children; show them how much you love them.
- ✓ Be an ally, advocate or mentor – help a young person find and develop their passion.
- ✓ Commit to life-long learning and take an active role in your children's education.
- ✓ Reach out to new and single parents – offer to make dinner, babysit, run errands, clean house, or walk the dog.
- ✓ Seek out whatever help you need to break the cycle of past hurts, violence or substance abuse that is keeping you from being the best partner, parent or friend you can be.



## Strength in numbers

**Yukon communities, community organizations, faith communities and service clubs** have a long and strong tradition of working together to make our communities better places to live, work, learn and grow old. We can build on this history.

- ✓ Start a public conversation about how to make your community a great place for children and families.
- ✓ Resist the temptation to wait for new programs, facilities, or money before taking action – small, low cost actions taken by many people add up.
- ✓ Build bridges and partnerships between First Nations and non-First Nations, governments and business, young and old.
- ✓ Think about ways to make healthy choices easier– make your community more walkable, create indoor and outdoor spaces where people of all ages can gather, talk, be active, have fun.
- ✓ Host events at times and locations which work for children and families. Think about cost, transportation, and other issues that might prevent some from participating. When it comes to young people, think about the after-school time period.



## Everyone's business

**Yukon businesses** deserve full marks for the in-kind contributions and donated goods and services they give to community organizations and events throughout the territory. Businesses have an impact on many aspects of child and family well-being.

- ✓ Explore ways to help employees balance work and family obligations.
- ✓ Work with other businesses and organizations to help meet the housing, educational and recreational needs of employees and their children.
- ✓ Provide a range of work opportunities and financial assistance (for example, scholarships) for youth.
- ✓ Take action on a specific goal to improve the health and well-being of children and families.

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*I think about the future a lot. The more we learn, and the more we are able to teach people what we know, the better our future can be. Our children are the future.*

**Yukon young person, Passions Video Project**

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## The heart of the community

**Schools** are one of the most important resources we have to create a more level playing field for all children. There are many personal stories of teachers who have made a huge difference in the lives of students. Schools can build on this tradition.

- ✓ Make the school a hub of activity for the community – a centre for sports, arts, culture, and health services during school, after school and on weekends for people of all ages.
- ✓ Adopt school policies that make healthy choices easier – for example, policies on physical activity during the day, the kind of food that is served or sold in the school, and inclusive, respectful schools can guide and support administrators, teachers and students.
- ✓ Make a call or send a note to parents once a year just to tell them something great about their kid.
- ✓ Support social-emotional learning and watch students thrive.



## Last but not least, a call to all levels of governments

**All levels of government** can be leaders when it comes to promoting the health and well-being of their citizens and their employees. Governments can:

- ✓ Make health a priority – with every decision, ask “how will this decision affect the health of my constituents?”
- ✓ Invest in programs, projects and services which will improve the health and well-being of children and families.
- ✓ Design towns, communities, and facilities that make healthy choices easier to make.
- ✓ Be a model employer – support employee wellness and adopt family-friendly policies and practices.
- ✓ Think “partnership” when taking action.

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*Having safe places for parents and children to drop in and hang out together, with other parents and children might be very useful for those feeling alone and having trouble coping.*

On-line survey respondent

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## Conclusion

**W**e have a large task before us. Experience in Yukon and elsewhere tells us that it takes time for new ways of thinking to become old hat, and changing what we do – whether in homes or offices – takes gentle, but continuous, support

and encouragement. Over time, small steps add up, and open our eyes to other possibilities to promote wellness in our everyday lives at home and work, in schools and communities.

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The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born.

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We know that there is a growing desire on the part of many people to embrace healthy living, join forces, take action, and make a difference.

Let's build a better future for our children by walking on the pathways to wellness together.



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***Thank you for helping to create a better future for  
all children and youth.***



**Yukon**  
Health and Social Services