



National Collaborating Centre
for Determinants of Health

Centre de collaboration nationale
des déterminants de la santé

LEARNING TOGETHER: WHAT IS A POPULATION HEALTH STATUS REPORT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?



This document was created to support the National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH) Population Health Status Reporting Initiative.

WHAT IS A POPULATION HEALTH STATUS REPORT?

There is no single definition of a population health status report in Canada. Various health jurisdictions, government and non-government organizations have employed health statistics to help paint a picture of a population's health and the issues confronting their communities. In some jurisdictions, public health system reforms require organizations to produce health status reports as part of their mandate, while others continue to generate these reports for accountability purposes and/or to address challenges facing their health systems.

Early health status reports summarized demographic, mortality and morbidity data, usually at an aggregated level. More recently, these reports have yielded an increasing breadth of data and more complex forms of statistical and epidemiological analyses. Population health status reports have become key building blocks for the construction and realignment of public health and population health policies^{1,2,3}.

Population health status reports are important public health tools that can highlight differences in health outcomes that are due to inequity. When used, population health status reports can inform decisions to improve health of the whole population and reduce disparities between sub-groups.

Population health status reports attempt to use the best available sources of data, health indicators and local knowledge to describe the health of a population. Some reports focus on health outcomes, risk factors and other determinants of health through the lifecycle of an entire geographic population, while others focus on specific subpopulations within a community or on a specific risk factor or health determinant. The focus and content of a health status report depends on the purpose and context as well as the underlying values that guide the process.

Common elements of a population health status report include:

- Population demographics (e.g., size, structure, geography)
- Disease/condition information (e.g., maternal and child health, communicable and chronic diseases, etc.)
- Risk data (e.g., risk factors and risk conditions)
- Analysis and interpretation (e.g., cost benefit analysis, key findings)
- Implications for programs and policies
- Recommendations for the local health area

For our purposes, a population health status report is an instrument that has the potential to use existing scientific and local knowledge to inform decisions, improve health programs, and reduce health inequities.

ADVANTAGES OF POPULATION HEALTH STATUS REPORTS

Population health status reports can be used in a number of ways:

- Meet performance standards related to core public health competencies (e.g., surveillance, accreditation standards)
- Support the systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of recent evidence, routinely collected and local data
- Effectively disseminate information (e.g., act as a knowledge translation tool)
- Identify knowledge gaps and opportunities for further analysis
- Assist in the development and evaluation of health system policy
- Help advocate for population health policies and re-orient health systems
- Target data, analysis and recommendations to the reduction of health inequalities and improvement of determinants of health
- Facilitate intersectoral collaboration by demonstrating the links between health and other sectors



ISSUES AND CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH POPULATION HEALTH STATUS REPORTS

While population health status reports are an essential tool for public health organizations, there are a number of challenges associated with the development, dissemination and implementation of recommendations, particularly related to the integration of health equity concepts:

- Lack of resources to support the complex and time-consuming nature of the work
- Lack of capacity (e.g., knowledge, skills, tools) within some public health organizations to develop comprehensive reports, resulting in variability/inequity between regions
- Lack of common methodology for report development, resulting in varying report structures and data making it difficult to make comparisons between reports and regions
- Methodological challenges related to identifying health indicators and accessing data
- Lack of relevant, local data and insufficient capacity to collect this data
- Political tensions related to the allocation of scarce resources within health authorities (e.g., reports for accountability vs. reports for social change)
- Unintended consequences of data/information that is misinterpreted or used for other purposes

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY

Population health status reports can help describe a jurisdiction's health issues and challenges, provide insight about how to address the key determinants of health impacting the community, and focus on potential policy solutions specifically for health inequities. Population health status reports can also be used as planning documents to help advocate for re-orientation of health systems as identified by the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion³.

The purpose of the National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH) Population Health Status Reporting Initiative (2011-2013) is to identify potential solutions to the challenges of developing and disseminating population health status reports. The initiative seeks to support Canadian public health organizations use population health status reports as a tool to help lead change for addressing social determinants of health and advancing health equity.

Examples of population health status reports in Canada

- Health Status Report: Sudbury and District Health Unit (2008). Available at: http://www.sdhu.com/uploads/content/listings/HealthStatusReportSDHU2008_revisedJuly2010.pdf
- Vancouver Coastal Health Population Health Report 2008: Reducing Health Disparities in Vancouver Coastal Health Communities: Population Health Priorities (2008). Available at: http://www.vch.ca/media/VCH_PopulationHealthReport.pdf
- Saskatoon Health Region Health Status Report 2008: A Report of The Chief Medical Health Officer (2008). Available at: http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your_health/documents/PHO/shr_health_status_report_2008_full.pdf
- Rural Health Status Report Saskatoon Health Region: A Report of The Chief Medical Health Officer (2009). Available at: http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your_health/documents/PHO/2009RuralHealthStatusReport.pdf
- Health in Peel 2011: Determinant and Disparities: Peel Health Region (2011). Available at: http://www.peelregion.ca/health/health-status-report/determinants/pdf/MOH-0036_Determinants_final.pdf

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2. Klazinga, N, Stronks, K, Delnoij, D & Verhoeff, A (2001). Indicators without a cause. Reflections on the development and use of indicators in health care from a public health perspective. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 13(6):433-438.
3. Harrison, KM and Dean, H (2011). Use of data systems to address social determinants of health: a need to do more [guest editorial]. *Public Health Reports*, Supplement 3, 126: 1-5.
4. World Health Organization (1986). Ottawa charter for health promotion. Geneva: WHO. Available at: http://www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/ottawa_charter_hp.pdf

To learn more about the NCCDH Population Health Status Reporting Initiative visit our website at www.nccdh.ca

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La version française est également disponible au : www.ccnds.ca sous le titre *Apprenons ensemble - Qu'est qu'un rapport sur l'état de santé d'une population et pourquoi est-ce important?*