

Healthy Built Environments

Chronic Disease in New Brunswick

Many preventable diseases and conditions are at chronic levels in New Brunswick. This places enormous pressure on families, caregivers, health/public health and social care professionals, the policing system and private and public sector productivity. With costs of treatment rising, and people living longer, there are concerns about long term costs for our health care system. Health spending presently makes up about 40 % of NB's overall budget and spending has increased by \$1 billion since 2004

Did you know?

- Rates of obesity among adults in NB range between 56 and 71% and between 20 and 28% for children and youth.
- Heart disease accounts for 20% off all deaths in NB and thousands more require medical treatment.

Does the Built Environment Matter?

There is an increasing body of evidence that shows the places where we live, work, study and play – the built environment – have a significant impact on our health. The built environment (BE) encompasses buildings and spaces (homes, schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods, parks, trails, industrial/commercial areas, etc), the products they contain, and the infrastructure (transportation, energy and agricultural systems) that links and supports them.

Recognition is growing that how our communities are planned and built, and the services and resources provided within them, directly impacts health. Research from around the world now shows that we can improve health and reduce illness through different approaches to planning and building our communities. The way we choose to develop highways, shape land use policies, and ensure access to nutritious food are just a few examples of BE decisions that can help or hinder our health goals.

BE Health Outcomes

Research indicates that the B.E. profoundly influences individual behaviours and health outcomes of a population including:

- chronic diseases (e.g. obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, some cancers)
- physical activity
- respiratory illnesses (e.g. asthma)
- injuries and injury-related fatalities
- exposure to environmental contaminants

About Healthier Built Environments in NB

One of the key challenges with creating healthier built environments is that decisions and policy influencing it are made across a variety of sectors and levels of government. One part of government acting alone will not be enough to achieve the necessary improvements; there is a clear need for collaboration between the various sectors and departments involved in decisions that affect the built environment. Planners, engineers, architects, municipal councillors, health professionals and other key BE stakeholders all play an important role in building healthier communities. In New Brunswick, intentional planning of the BE using a health lens is being discussed as a means of helping to prevent chronic disease and improve community resilience.

Within the NB Department of Health, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OMCOH) entered into a partnership agreement with the Heart and Stroke Foundation as part of a multijurisdictional project entitled “Healthy Canada by Design”. This national project is a partnership of public health, planning and transportation professionals and non-governmental organizations, from across Canada, that are working together to create healthy and sustainable communities that support and foster physical activity, active transportation and public transit.

The purpose of this work is to work collaboratively with local planners, engineers, municipalities, health professionals and other stakeholders to identify strategic areas of action and accelerate integration of health considerations in built environment policy and practice.

