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Additional hardcopies of the background paper can be obtained by contacting us by phone or email. The background paper can also be downloaded from our website: www.yukonwellness.ca

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The Department of Health and Social Services wants to support Yukon people, families and communities to have the best possible health. The challenge is big, and it can’t be done overnight. It will take the effort of all of us over many years to reap the rewards. Together we can do it, but we need a plan.

We all want long, healthy lives so that we can enjoy our family and friends, and contribute to our communities. We want our children to have the best possible future, and grow to be healthy, active, adults who make the most out of life. And we hope to have the energy and ability to keep up with our grandchildren.

In every community throughout Yukon, there are people who are taking charge of their own health and well-being, and are working with others to build healthy, vibrant communities.

But this is not the whole story.

Many of us are less fit and more stressed than our parents and grandparents. More of us are being diagnosed with chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. And too many lives are cut short by accidents and injuries.

For the first time, today’s children may live shorter and less healthy lives than their parents.

Together we can turn this around. Small steps taken by many people add up; together we can build communities that make a long and healthy life a real possibility for Yukoners of all ages and abilities.

This background paper provides some basic information about wellness and what we know about the health and well-being of Yukoners. We also look at the factors that influence our health and what we can do to improve our health.

We hope that Pathways to Wellness will build a common base and be a starting point for thinking and talking about what really matters.

We are working on a second paper which focuses on child and family wellness that will be released in fall 2012. This paper will build on the ideas presented in Pathways to Wellness. We hope that the two papers will move you to help us create a Wellness Plan for Yukon’s Children and Families.

In the meantime, you can:

• **Think** about your own health and share what you have learned about what works to keep yourself and your family well.

• **Imagine** a future where ALL Yukoners are healthy and living life fully. What would that look like for you and your family? What would it look like for the children and families in your community?

• **Read** this paper and visit our website, www.yukonwellness.ca. Think about how you would apply these ideas to improving the health and well-being of Yukon’s children and families.
What is wellness?

At a glance:

• Wellness is about feeling good and living well.
• There are six dimensions to wellness; the dimensions are important both on their own and how they work together.
• Relationships are central to our well-being.
• Community wellness is about people acting together – in good times and bad – to make life better for everyone.

Wellness is about what we do every day where we live, learn, work, and play to feel good and function well.

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

Wellness begins in the family with parents who provide safe, nurturing, loving environments, brothers, sisters and cousins who share and play fair, and grandparents who pass on family history, traditions, and wisdom.

Wellness grows in communities that are safe and inclusive, and provide cultural, sport and recreational opportunities for people of all ages and abilities. Communities which promote wellness encourage open debate and ensure that people have a voice in decisions that matter to them.

Wellness includes curiosity and life-long learning that begins in the home, and is nurtured in schools, workplaces and the community at large.

Wellness is supported when there are employment opportunities for all, and jobs are safe, rewarding, and pay a fair wage.

Wellness is about eating healthy foods, being physically active, and avoiding tobacco and the abuse of alcohol and other drugs.

Wellness is about being able to handle life’s ups and downs, finding meaning, and living our values – love, compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, responsibility, harmony, and concern for others.

And most importantly, wellness is the relationships we nurture with family, friends, co-workers, neighbours and others.
Ideally activities which promote wellness are part of our everyday life, allowing us to live fully and meaningfully while bringing out the best in all of us.

Wellness is about finding balance – by taking care of our own needs and desires, but also supporting and caring for others. It’s about making sure we have downtime and also spend our time with people and activities that matter most.

Illness, changes to our work, and even falling in love can throw us off-balance. At different times in our lives, some aspects of wellness will be more important than others.

For example, a person who is dying may be failing physically, but experience spiritual and emotional wellness.

It’s important to pay attention to all aspects of well-being, not just our physical health.

THE SIX DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS

The six dimensions of wellness – physical, mental/emotional, intellectual, spiritual, occupational and social – are each important on their own and even more so because they are interconnected. (See diagram on page 7.)

For example, a child who is physically active is more likely to do well in school.

Seniors and elders who are socially active are more likely to enjoy physical and mental health.

In this way, wellness is holistic and reflects the breadth and depth of our experience as individuals and as members of families, workplaces and communities.
Dimensions of Individual Wellness
A holistic model of wellness

This model of wellness reflects the research on wellness and how different cultures view wellness. Other models have as few as three dimensions; some have as many as ten or eleven. The six dimensions in this model have been shown to have a significant impact on overall health and well-being, and are the ones most frequently mentioned in the wellness literature.
The social dimension – it's about relationships

Social wellness is drawn as a ring around the other five wellness dimensions to highlight the importance of social connections and social support to overall wellness.

Relationships are our greatest source of happiness, joy and belonging; they are also our greatest source of pain. This is true within our homes, our workplaces, our neighbourhoods, and our communities.

At their best, relationships are a source of information, advice, and ideas; practical assistance and support; encouragement and motivation; companionship; introductions to new people and opportunities; and feedback about ourselves.

In addition to these benefits, it turns out that we are happier and feel more fulfilled when we give to others. Small everyday acts of gratitude, kindness and caring do double time – they improve the quality of your life, and the lives of those around you.

Changing your behaviour can also influence others to change their behaviour. When it comes to behaviours like eating, active living, drinking, and smoking, we tend to do what people around us are doing.

Making and maintaining positive changes to improve our health and wellness is almost always easier if we have encouragement and support from our friends, family or co-workers. Very few of us succeed all on our own.

In this way, wellness can spread from person to person, and everyone benefits.

HEALTHY FAMILIES

“The foundation of a healthy community is a healthy individual in the context of a healthy family network. Traditionally this was not the individualistic pursuit that is the trend today, but rather a group endeavour in which everyone from very young children to elders had their important and respected roles. Throughout the entire life’s journey, relationships and interdependence with family, clan, community and the land were treated with great respect.”

From: Reclaiming the well-being of our People, Council of Yukon First Nations (2006)
Small steps to well-being

Here are some things you can do every day to improve your wellness.

CONNECT...
With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Think of these relationships as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them.

BE ACTIVE...

TAKE NOTICE...
Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Savour the moment.

KEEP LEARNING...
Try something new. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving.

GIVE...
Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?
Think about your day from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep.
What did you do that contributed to your wellness?
Were there opportunities to connect, be active, take notice, keep learning or give?
What was missing? What would you like to do more of?
What about tomorrow? What small action can you take to improve your sense of wellness?

Adapted from: “Five Ways to Well-being”, new economics foundation
www.neweconomics.org
What about community wellness?

Wellness is not just about what each of us does as individuals. It is also about how we affect each other, and the impact that we can have together on the health of our community.

A healthy community is more than a group of healthy individuals. Community wellness is about the ability and willingness of people to act together – in good times, and in bad – in ways which benefit everyone. We know that tragedy can strike at any time, and in communities as small as ours, everyone can be affected.

Healthy communities are built on the relationships that we nurture and the efforts that we make to work through the problems we encounter along the way. It is also about celebrating our successes as a community.

Yukoners and Yukon communities have a strong tradition of working together to care for each other and make our communities better places to live, work, learn and grow old.
How well are we?

At a glance...

- There are many ways in which the health of Yukoners is better than other Canadians.
- There are also reasons to be concerned about our health, and the health of our children.
- There is a wellness gap: some groups of people are not as healthy as others because they face more barriers and have fewer opportunities to improve their health.
- Generally speaking, rural residents, low income individuals and First Nations people have poorer health.

We have reason to be proud of how Yukoners are taking steps to improve the quality of their lives and the vitality of their communities.

- Yukoners, especially those who live in rural communities, report a greater sense of community belonging compared to other Canadians.
- We are among the most active of Canadians – but there is still room for improvement as only 55 percent of us are active, or moderately active.
- We lead the country in our ability to read, understand and use information about our health.
- In any given year, two out of every three Yukoners attempt to make changes to improve their health.
- Yukon mothers are more likely to breastfeed, and to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months, than are other Canadian mothers.
- Yukoners are well-educated – a large percentage of Yukoners have high school diplomas or college degrees.

In every community, people are working together to promote health: from community gardens and greenhouses to curling bonspiels, pick-up hockey games, and cultural celebrations – the list is long.

When a hand is needed, Yukoners step up to the plate. We saw this when we hosted the Canada Winter Games in 2007 and again when individuals and businesses throughout the territory rallied to replace hockey equipment lost in the fire that destroyed the Ross River arena.

When it comes to wellness, we also have an incredible advantage over many other Canadians – nature is literally at our doorstep. Research on wellness and First Nations values point in the same direction: living on or close to the land is good for our mental, physical and spiritual well-being.

We also understand the importance of passing laws that promote health and reduce risks. Making public spaces smoke-free and banning hand-held cell phones while driving are recent changes to the law that make it healthier and safer for everyone.

These are all examples of how wellness can be promoted, and they are strengths we can build on.
On the other hand...

Despite these strengths, we face challenges that will take commitment, ingenuity and good will on all our parts to solve.

- Our smoking rate is about 50 percent higher than the Canadian average.
- Yukoners are more likely to binge drink than other Canadians.
- Fatal injuries are many times higher in Yukon than Canada as a whole.
- Many Yukoners do not eat enough vegetables and fruits to maintain good health.
- Diabetes is on the rise. The number of Yukoners aged 20 years and older living with diabetes more than doubled from 1998 to 2008, going from 3.2 to 7.8 percent of the population.
- A recent survey of Grade 6-10 students suggests that bullying, emotional well-being, school belongingness, cannabis use, and healthy eating are problem areas for many young people.

One of the challenges we face in Yukon is to find ways to expand opportunities for healthy living which are practical and sustainable, particularly in the smallest communities. Too often good work revolves around a single person. When that person leaves the community, or burns out, there may be no one to fill the gap. This reality highlights the importance of building strengths, skills and capacity among many people within every community.

Throughout this report, we have used data from a variety of sources including the Canadian Community Health Surveys, the Health Behaviours of School-Aged Children Survey, the Yukon Social Inclusion Household Survey, and other administrative and surveillance databases.
The wellness gap?

We all want to live long healthy lives, but we don’t all start off with the same opportunities. And some of us face more hurdles in life than others. The choices we make are shaped by the opportunities we have.

If our efforts to improve health work for those who have the poorest health and the least access to resources, those who are better off will benefit as well.

To make progress on achieving health, wellness and a better quality of life for all Yukoners, we need to look at those groups who have the poorest health and fewest options for improving their health.

Who are these groups in Yukon?

The data that are available highlight three groups of Yukoners: rural Yukoners, low income individuals and families, and First Nations people.

On the following page are some examples which illustrate these differences.
Life expectancy at birth is the number of years a person can expect to live.

First Nation Yukoners live shorter lives than non-First Nation Yukoners. The difference is about 7.1 years. The gap is larger for men than for women.

We have made some progress in closing the gap in life expectancy of First Nation and non-First Nation Yukoners, but we still have a way to go. From 1994 to 2006, the gap shrunk by about two years. If we continue to do what we have been doing, it will take at least 40 years to close the gap. We can do better than this if we work together and build on the strengths of First Nations people in Yukon.

In 2009, Grade 6-10 students were asked questions about their health and factors which affect their health, including the extent to which they feel they belong at school.

Students who feel part of the school community are more likely to attend school, do better in school, and graduate.

Across gender, grade and place of residence, at least one Yukon student out of three feels that they do not belong in school.

The other important finding is that Grade 9-10 students living in rural Yukon feel much less connected to school than other students. Just over 40 percent of older rural students feel they belong at school compared to 60 percent of Whitehorse students – this may help explain why rural students are more likely to drop out of school.

Education is an important predictor of health. The path to a healthy future is more difficult for those who leave school early.

1 The data for First Nation Yukoners has been estimated based upon vital statistics records for status Indians. Yukon Bureau of Statistics.
Food insecurity is a measure of the accessibility, affordability and availability of quality food for sale in stores. A 2010 survey found that in the previous 12 months, 61 percent of low-income Yukoners either:

- ran out of food before they had money to buy more,
- worried that they would run out of food before they had money to buy more, or
- could not to afford to eat balanced meals.

Despite the fact that many people in the Yukon hunt, fish, gather and grow food, some people don’t have enough to eat.

Food insecurity is related to income. Only 4 percent of the highest income earners experienced food insecurity compared to 61 percent of low-income earners.

Food insecurity makes it difficult, if not impossible, for families to eat healthy, nutritious meals.
What influences our health?

At a glance...

- Smoking, inactivity, foods high in salt, sugar or fat, and alcohol and drug use are taking a toll on our health.
- These “lifestyle” choices are not made in a vacuum.
- Our health is influenced by many factors: biology, personal decisions and behaviour, what our friends, family and neighbours do, the physical environment in which we live, work and learn, and broad socio-economic factors.
- The choices we make are shaped by the choices we have.

Eating well, keeping active and productive, and getting a good night’s sleep are examples of how we keep ourselves and our families healthier. On paper, this sounds straightforward – in practice, it is far more complex.

Personal choice – the decisions we make every day – is important, but not everyone has the same choices, or the same chances, to be healthy. We are also influenced by genetics and biology, how we were raised, our immediate environment, and broader factors such as educational opportunities, historical events and the economy. Taken together, these factors help explain how we got here, and even more importantly, where we can go from here.

Luck and coincidence also play a role in our lives, but we can’t control or plan for this. The best we can do is to be open to opportunities that come our way, and make the most of them.
A good start in life

Raising healthy, active, curious children begins before birth. From birth to 3 years of age, there is an explosion in brain growth. Early experiences – both before birth and after – determine whether the brain’s pathways and connections provide a strong or weak foundation for health and wellness throughout life.

In an ideal world, all pregnant women would be supported by family and friends to eat well, take folic acid, avoid tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, and get good pre-natal care throughout their pregnancy.

Babies are born to learn. Through exploration, play and physical contact with others, babies and young children learn how to control their muscles and emotions, speak, and form relationships. They develop a sense of self. Children who have caring, responsive parents and caregivers and a safe, supportive environment get the best start in life.

Prenatal care, support to young families, and quality early childhood experiences start children on the best possible future.

It makes sense to make the early years a priority when it comes to promoting health and preventing illness, injury and disability.

Wired for survival

Our bodies are hard-wired for survival. Eating foods high in fat and sugar and conserving energy helped people survive famines. The problem in the western world today is that it is easy to eat too often, too much, and with little or no effort.

Another example of hard wiring is the flight-or-fight response which provides quick energy and strength when we need to defend ourselves or run from danger. When this response is triggered too often by everyday demands and stresses or unresolved trauma (which don’t require speed or physical strength to solve), it contributes to stress-related chronic conditions like high blood pressure.

NATURE NURTURES

There is good evidence that contact with nature promotes physical and mental well-being, quality of life, and community wellness. You don’t even have to actually be outdoors to get the benefits – just being able to look through a window has positive benefits.

If Northerners suffer cabin fever when we are forced indoors at 50 below, do you think city dwellers might suffer from a chronic case of “urban fever”?
Modern living

Life today is very different from the life our relatives lived even 50 years ago. We have too much to do and too little time – one-third of Yukoners who want to do more to improve their health can't find the time.

Pre-packaged and fast foods may seem to make sense – they are easy to find, may be cheap, and take little or no time to prepare. Unfortunately they also tend to be high in fat, salt, or sugar – all of which are bad for our health.

Modern conveniences and labour-saving devices, from cars, ATVs, and snowmobiles to dishwashers and washing machines, eliminate physical activity from our lives. The Internet, cellphones, and computer tablets allow us to chat, shop, gamble, and work 24/7, without leaving our home or even moving off the couch.

We cram more and more into our busy days, and sleep less and less. We use tobacco to give ourselves a break, and alcohol and drugs to relieve stress and dull emotional pain from past hurts and traumas.

The pressure to keep up and to keep going is killing us…literally.
Our social environment

We are social beings. We influence the people around us – our families, friends, and the community at large. And they influence us.

We want to fit in, be like the people we admire, keep pace with others. Just think of how quickly we adopt the current trends in clothing, music, hairstyles and even food.

A similar thing happens when it comes to health. What we do, how we think, and what we feel are affected by those around us. This can be positive as when people of all ages come out for a community dance. But these influences can also be negative as when a friend offers a cigarette, or a drink, to someone who is trying to quit.

Emotions like happiness and depression can spread from person to person. Behaviours like drinking, smoking, volunteering, and exercising also spread through social networks.

Whether a person is motivated to try a new, healthier behaviour and whether they are successful in maintaining a change, often depends on what others are doing around them. But sometimes all it takes is one or two people to adopt a new, healthier behaviour to start a chain reaction!

Of course, social relationships are not only about influencing others. Social relationships are good, in and of themselves. People who are well connected with others enjoy better physical and mental health, are happier and live longer.

http://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement.html

LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS

Not all of us are comfortable being leaders. But that’s okay. Leaders are important, but followers are even more important because followers can transform the actions of a single person into a social change. If you see someone doing something good, have the courage to follow them and show others how to follow. You might just create a movement!
Our physical environment

Some people are healthier than others because the environments in which they live, learn, work and play provide more opportunities and support for healthy behaviour.

A healthy environment begins with clean, safe water, air and land – we are fortunate that there is little pollution and few contaminants in the Yukon. Our ability to interact with nature on a daily basis gives us a clear advantage over most other Canadians. The natural environment and our connections to the land, water, animals and plants are a fundamental component of building and sustaining good health.

In the past, people travelled by foot, and survived by hunting, gathering and growing their own food. Our ancestors were close to the land and experienced the many benefits of nature. Physical activity was not exercise – it was part of daily life.

Today, we must pay attention to how buildings, roads and walkways, and public spaces are designed so that neighbourhoods are safe and people can be active. Communities that are spread out – like Whitehorse is – make us more reliant on cars to get around. It’s easy to see how being physically active becomes “working out” rather than part of regular daily activities.

Stores that stock healthy foods and restaurants that serve healthy meals at affordable prices are also examples of physical environments which make healthy choices possible and easier.

When it comes to activity and eating, even small changes in the immediate environment can make a difference in what we do. Safe, visible stairwells make it easier to take the stairs rather than the elevator, and labeling healthier choices at restaurants can prompt us to order a salad instead of French fries.
The bigger picture

Income, education and employment play a big role in how healthy we are – people who have completed high school or college, have stable and safe employment, live in safe homes and neighbourhoods, and can afford to take part in cultural, sport and recreational opportunities tend to be healthier throughout their lives, and live longer.

In Yukon, the legacy of Indian residential schools and past government practices continues to influence the health of Yukon First Nations people. The settlement of land claims and self-government agreements in the Yukon, and the preservation of culture and language, lay the foundation for a healthier future for Yukon First Nations people, and by extension all Yukoners.

Self-determination is an important influence on the health of First Nation people. The level of self-determination is directly linked to the degree of hope felt by individuals and communities. Research has shown the positive and protective influence of self-government on First Nation communities and individuals.

Policies that guide economic development, land use planning, agriculture and protection of the environment influence the sustainability and vitality of Yukon communities. Community infrastructure, support for municipalities, and affordable housing influence the resources and opportunities available to Yukoners to protect and improve their health. The range of educational opportunities and the financial support for students entering trade schools, colleges and universities build a healthy, prosperous Yukon for all.

All of these are examples of broad societal factors that create options and opportunities for individuals, families and communities to support health and wellness.

FIRST NATION VALUES AND TRADITIONS BENEFIT ALL YUKONERS

Yukon First Nations people have lived for many centuries on this land we share today. As a people, they faced colonization, loss of land and culture, and residential schools, and their health has suffered as a result.

Through it all, First Nations have shown great resilience. They have retained many values and traditions which can inspire and benefit all of us – living close to and in harmony with nature, the importance of family, and the ethic of sharing, to name a few.
What can we do?

Countries around the world are taking action to promote health and wellness. We can learn from what others have done, but we also need to find solutions that will work for Yukon people, families and communities.

What works?

We can start by looking at the lessons learned in other parts of Canada and other countries, and the research into what makes a real difference in the lives of people.

1. Pay attention to the wellness gap

We know that "one size fits all" programs can improve the overall health of a population, but not reduce the gap between the most and least healthy.

Sometimes, despite the best intentions, our efforts actually increase the gap.

For example, many health promotion programs related to tobacco use, healthy eating and physical activity tend to have a greater impact on middle or higher income earners than on lower income earners. People who have higher incomes may be able to use their money to access services and supports that can help them make these changes. This has the unintended consequence of increasing the gap between the least and most healthy.

In order to be successful in closing the wellness gap, we need to keep the needs and life circumstances of people who face more barriers – low income families, rural residents, and First Nations people – at the forefront. This is an important way to achieve health for all.
2. Start early in life

Most children are born with the potential to grow, learn and thrive. Positive experiences with the people in their lives and a safe physical environment are needed to develop this potential.

Early positive experiences lay the foundation for the future by building healthy bodies, strong minds, and big hearts. Nutritious food, caring parents and other caregivers, a safe environment, and opportunities to play and explore are key to developing self-confidence and the skills needed to walk, talk, share, and care. The first five years of life are the most important five years when it comes to life-long health, well-being and learning.

Research shows that giving all children a healthy start to life has a very high return on investment. Strengthening families and building communities where all children are welcomed, valued, and nurtured build a brighter future for everyone.

3. Fun and connection, not fear or facts

Fear and facts may raise awareness and build knowledge, but they aren’t very good at motivating people to change their behaviour over the long term. For example, Yukoners of all ages know that smoking is harmful to their own health and to others who are exposed to second-hand smoke. But this knowledge alone isn’t enough to help Yukon smokers quit or to prevent young people from taking up the habit.

We are more likely to adopt new behaviours when health messages are personal and touch us at an emotional level. We all want to be in charge of our lives, be part of something bigger than ourselves, and have an active role in creating our future.

To be effective, health promotion and prevention efforts must connect with people’s wants, needs and desires – love, hope, belonging, recognition, fun and of course sex are high on this list.
4. Make healthy choices easier

Changing behaviour, overcoming addictions, and developing healthier habits are difficult, especially if we rely on willpower. Willpower works like a muscle – it gets stronger with practice but the daily store of willpower is limited and gets depleted with over-use.

In a world of temptation where unhealthy foods are all around, alcohol and street drugs are easy to get, and modern conveniences make it easy to be inactive, reliance on self-control and self-discipline is a set-up for personal failure.

Part of the solution is to change our surroundings to make healthy choices easier, and unhealthy choices more difficult. Too often it’s the other way around. For example, refrigerators and vending machines stocked with pop, energy drinks, chips and chocolate bars set us up to make unhealthy choices. Imagine if cut-up fruit and vegetables were as easy to grab as a bag of chips.

Making healthier options available and limiting unhealthy choices – at home, work and school – goes a long way in supporting individuals to make healthy changes.

It’s also easier to make healthier choices if the people around you are making healthier choices. Having a walking buddy or an AA sponsor, going to the rec centre, joining the curling club or organizing a parent and tot group all use the power of social connections to support healthy living.

WHAT ABOUT ALCOHOL AND DRUGS?

Alcohol and drug use is a serious problem in Yukon. It is tempting to focus on the need for treatment. But to get ahead of the problem, we need to prevent substance abuse and promote well-being. This is where wellness comes in: it acts as “bookends” along the continuum of care.

At one end, promoting healthy child development, creating environments which inspire young people, generating real options for the future and preventing the harmful use of alcohol comprise one Wellness “bookend”. On the other end of the continuum, the very activities which promote family and community wellness also create a supportive after-care environment for those returning home from alcohol and drug treatment. A supportive family and community is the other “bookend”.

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5. Think big, act local
Planning for health works best when people take action together on local issues which affect them personally. Every person can be a source of knowledge, strength and wisdom. Better, more creative solutions are found when many people contribute. In the process, relationships, trust and commitment are built. This is social support in action!

Community members are more knowledgeable about local strengths and priorities, and are often able to act more quickly than central governments. Many people acting together can accomplish more than the same number of people acting alone.

Success builds on success. Communities which experience a sense of accomplishment in one area often move on to other, bigger challenges because they have built a strong foundation for creating a better future together.

6. Laws and taxes
Laws can play an important role in shaping attitudes and reinforcing behaviour to protect health and reduce risks, especially when coupled with education and enforcement. Laws which ban drinking and driving, texting while driving, and smoking in public places make it safer for all of us and create new social norms for what is acceptable behaviour.

Taxes are another way in which governments can influence behaviour. When the price of alcohol or tobacco goes up, consumption goes down – especially among young people. Many governments are now looking at increasing taxes on sugar sweetened drinks, like pop and fruit drinks, as a way of reducing consumption of a leading contributor to overweight and obesity.
Working together

Wellness touches all our activities in all the settings in which we live, work, learn, play and worship. So who has a role to play? Just about everyone.

There are roles for doctors and nurses, teachers and day-care workers, builders and planners, recreation leaders and sports enthusiasts, artists and dancers, businesses, employers and unions, faith communities, community organizations, service clubs, and the media.

Everyone has a role to play when it comes to wellness, and there is a role for you.

As individuals...

We can start by learning more about wellness and begin to make small changes in our lives and within our family that promote wellness. We can share what we’ve learned with others, and invite friends and other family members to join in.

Every day Yukoners – as parents, friends, neighbours, volunteers and caregivers – take action to make lives better for others. Personal support and encouragement, empathy, caring, and practical help benefit both the giver and the receiver. We need to keep doing this.

But wellness is not just about personal decision making and behavior. It is also about creating environments – both social and physical environments – which promote wellness in our homes, schools, workplaces, churches, neighbourhoods, and the community at large. Everyone benefits when healthy choices are the easy choices to make.

Every individual, and every step an individual takes to improve their own health, builds momentum and creates new social norms.

As informal groups...

We can find like-minded people and organize activities that do double duty by building social connections and addressing some other aspect of wellness. Starting a walking group or a community kitchen are examples of no cost, or low cost, activities which can make a real difference.

Within organizations and businesses...

Employers and community organizations can look both inward and outward when it comes to wellness. Making staff, volunteer and member wellness a priority builds stronger, more resilient organizations and increases safety, productivity, retention and the bottom line.

Employers and community organizations can also apply a wellness lens to the services they offer to customers and clients, and ask how they can play a role in closing the wellness gap.

Workers and volunteers in all sectors can take steps to protect their own health, and promote the health of clients, customers and co-workers. This holds true whether we are talking about the health sector, the education sector or the mining sector. One-half of our waking lives is spent at work – that’s a lot of time and a lot of opportunity to promote wellness.
At a community level...

Addressing the wellness gap and building healthy communities require broad, inclusive action. Individuals acting alone or in small groups can’t take this on; nor can government alone shoulder the responsibility.

We need to “pool” our knowledge, skills and resources to tackle issues that are bigger, more complex, or more difficult to change. This is where businesses, faith communities, service clubs and governments can join forces with individuals and community groups.

The kinds of actions that we can take together are limited only by our ability to imagine a different future.

Here too relationships are important – between men and women; young and old; people of different ethnic backgrounds; governments and their citizens; employers and workers; teachers, students, parents and school councils. We need to work with conviction and goodwill to create strong, respectful partnerships where everyone has a seat at the table.

As governments...

Governments can play an important role by looking for opportunities to promote health and well-being in their core activities, by making citizen participation a priority, and by being a partner at the table with other organizations and businesses.

Governments also have a unique role to play by enacting laws and regulations, using financial and tax measures, and managing, investing, and allocating public funds in ways which promote healthy decisions and environments, and discourage unhealthy behaviours and environments. Government has a role in shaping the small and big influences on the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities.

Governments also have a significant role to play in tracking and reporting on the health of Yukoners and the progress we are making in achieving health goals.

John Ostashek, Yukon Government Leader; Judy Gingell, Chair of Council for Yukon Indians and Tom Siddon, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada at the signing of the Umbrella Final Agreement and the first four Yukon land claims agreements at Whitehorse, Yukon on May 29, 1993.
Wellness covers the lifespan from infancy to old age, in all the places we spend time – our homes, day cares, schools, recreation centres, workplaces, and public spaces. It includes physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, occupational and social wellness.

The idea of wellness has taken hold. Today in Yukon many people, organizations, businesses, communities and all level of government are taking steps to promote health and wellness. We can build on this work to chart an even better future – one that is built on our strengths, hopes and dreams.

We need to both focus and accelerate our efforts in order to get ahead of the high rates of smoking, binge drinking, and other high risk behaviours, and the rising tide of chronic diseases that threaten our quality of life and future generations.

No single approach or plan can do it all, or at least not well. We need to begin by carving off a piece of work that is manageable, realistic, and will move us closer to the goal of a healthier future for everyone.

We know that health is influenced by many factors. We can’t tackle them all at once but we can focus our efforts on promoting well-being, and preventing illness and injury.

We also know that the biggest return on our efforts comes when we ensure that our children get a healthy start in life, and young people are given opportunities to belong, achieve, and contribute. There is no better place to begin.

Over the next several months, we will be reaching out to Yukoners of all ages and in all communities to spark action which will improve the health and well-being of Yukon children and families. Through conversations, connections and commitment, we can make a difference today and build a plan for the future.

Where should we begin?

**IT TAKES A VILLAGE...**

According to Justice Murray Sinclair, the role of First Nations communities is to help young people answer four questions:

- Where do I come from?
- Where am I going?
- Why am I here?
- Who am I?

The answers to these questions connect young people to their history and culture, and inspire them to discover their strengths and passions. The answers form the basis of their identity.

“The importance of identity cannot be overstated. Identity gives hope, direction, self-respect, sense of belonging, and sense of balance.”

From: Invited talk, Mental Health Summit 2012, Winnipeg, MB.
Be part of the conversation

We are interested in hearing from you. There are a few ways in which you can help shape our approach to health and wellness in Yukon:

- **Visit** our website, www.yukonwellness.ca, which has specific information on wellness topics that may be of interest to you, including what you can do to make positive changes in your home, school, workplace, or community. Your feedback on how informative and useful this paper and the website are will help us create new web content and shape the paper on child and family wellness.

- **Tell us** about your experience of taking action on wellness and the lessons you have learned about what works. Evidence from studies and surveys is important, but it doesn’t tell the whole story. Personal experience is also an important source of knowledge, and when combined with research evidence paints a more complete picture of wellness.

- **Share** your ideas with us about how to apply the information in this paper to child and family wellness.

- **Track** our progress by visiting our website on a regular basis and watching for announcements in the local media. We are interested in meeting with individuals and groups, and plan to visit all communities this fall and winter. We’d like to tap into your knowledge about how to make these conversations meaningful, and connect with people and groups who can make a difference in the lives of children and families.

- **Remember**, we are only an email or phone call away, and we’d love to hear from you! (See the inside front cover for our contact information.)
Our approach to wellness has been shaped by the writing, thinking and research of Canadian and international scholars from many disciplines including psychology, epidemiology, sociology, medicine, and business. The papers, reports and articles below informed the development of this background paper, and represent some of the most significant influences on our thinking.


