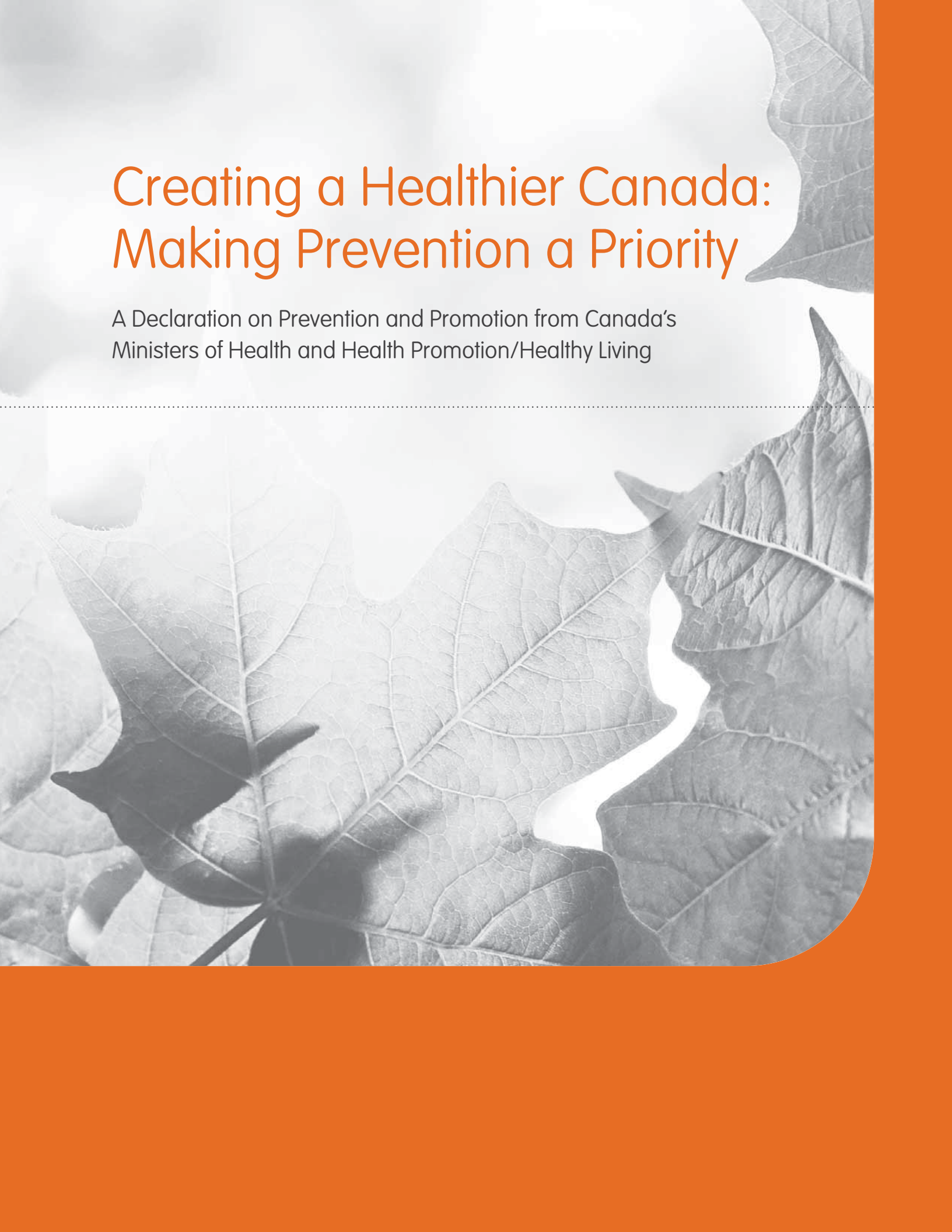


Creating a Healthier Canada: Making Prevention a Priority

A Declaration on Prevention and Promotion from Canada's
Ministers of Health and Health Promotion/Healthy Living



It should be noted that although Quebec shares the general goals of this Declaration, it was not involved in developing it and does not subscribe to a Canada-wide strategy in this area. Quebec intends to remain solely responsible for developing and implementing programs for promoting healthy living within its territory. However, Quebec does intend to continue exchanging information and expertise with other governments in Canada.

Our Vision

Through this Declaration on Prevention and Promotion, we [the Ministers of Health and of Health Promotion/Healthy Living of Canada] express our view that the promotion of health and the prevention of disease, disability and injury are a priority and necessary to the sustainability of the health system.

We collectively declare our vision for a Canada in which governments work together and with private, non-profit, municipal, academic and community sectors, and with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, to improve health and reduce health disparities and to build and influence the physical, social and economic conditions that will promote health and wellness, and prevent illness so that Canadians can enjoy good health for years to come.

We agree that:

- > The health of the population is an important measure of—and an important contributor to—the overall well-being of society.
- > Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. It is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
- > People value their health and want to live long lives in good health.
- > Some people, such as some First Nations, Inuit and Métis people—who occupy a unique place in Canada by virtue of history and health status—and those with lower levels of income and education, do not enjoy the same good health as the rest of the Canadian population.

We recognize that:

- > Disease, disability and injury remain a serious concern in Canada today and must be addressed.
- > Positive mental health and mental fitness are a foundation for optimal overall health and well-being, throughout the lifespan.
- > Infectious diseases remain an on-going threat that requires continued attention and would benefit from prevention and promotion.
- > The main causes of death, disease and disability in Canada today are chronic diseases and injuries.
- > A large proportion of chronic diseases, disabilities, and injuries can be prevented, or their onset can be delayed.

- > Ongoing health promotion and disease prevention efforts are needed, even for those who already have disabilities and chronic diseases. Prevention needs to be the first step in management.
- > The health of the population is determined by many factors including:
 - › the environmental, social, economic and cultural conditions of our society and communities;
 - › the physical and social conditions that people experience daily in the places where they live, learn, work and play;
 - › healthy pregnancy and early childhood development;
 - › the availability, accessibility and quality of health care, social, educational and other services;
 - › our personal characteristics and behaviour, such as lifestyle choices; and
 - › biological factors such as sex, age and genetic legacy.
- > Most of these factors lie beyond the reach of the health system alone and actions to change them require a wide effort from both within and outside governments.
- > Disparities in health exist and, where they can be changed, we will work together with our partners in and outside governments to try to reduce or remove such differences.

Historical Context

In October 2005, Canada's Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers of Health agreed that:

As a nation, we aspire to a Canada in which every person is as healthy as they can be—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

At that time, Ministers of Health also agreed to a plan, called the *Integrated Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy*, which defines a healthy nation as one “in which all Canadians experience the conditions that support the attainment of good health.” The strategy identifies two goals: improved overall health and reduced health disparities.

This Declaration reflects the important role that health promotion and disease and injury prevention play in improving the health of Canadians. By working together to support prevention and promotion within and outside the health-care system, the health and well-being of all Canadians will benefit.

Guiding Principles

More emphasis needs to be placed on the promotion of health and on preventing or delaying chronic diseases, disabilities, and injuries. Doing this will improve the quality of life of Canadians while reducing disparities in health and the impact these conditions have on individuals, families, communities, the health-care system and on society.

Canadians expect to receive high-quality, accessible and comprehensive health care when they are ill. They also value effective prevention and promotion services and supports that enable them to stay healthy.

The following five principles have and will continue to guide our efforts to strengthen and support prevention and promotion in Canada and its provinces and territories.

Prevention is a priority

Canadians value their health. They prefer to live a long life in good health while preventing disease or injury, rather than experiencing severe illness and the pain, suffering and loss of income that they can cause; they also want to avoid premature death. Promoting good health just makes sense.

While we have the means to prevent or delay many health problems, Canada's current health system is mainly focused on diagnosis, treatment and care. To create healthier populations, and to sustain our publicly funded health system, a better balance between prevention and treatment must be achieved.

Prevention is a hallmark of a quality health system

Internationally, health promotion and prevention are recognized as essential pieces of high-quality health systems. Through this Declaration, Canada is showing leadership in making prevention and promotion a priority.

Prevention is the first step in management

Many Canadians will develop and have to live with chronic diseases or disabilities. By encouraging healthier living and

promoting preventive health services, we can help Canadians living with these conditions to maintain or improve their health and prevent the development of additional chronic diseases.

Health promotion has many approaches that should be used

The overall health of Canadians can be improved, and many health problems can be prevented. This can be done by:

- > Changing risk factors and conditions that lie outside the health sector;
- > Providing population health promotion initiatives and public health services working with, and in support of, the communities and families they are meant to serve;
- > Ensuring Canadians can access and use appropriate effective clinical prevention services;
- > Helping people learn and practise healthy ways of living;
- > Doing and using research to build the evidence on what creates good health, the broad causes of disease and injury and how to influence them.

In an ideal situation, all of these strategies would be used together.

How an issue is approached should be based on the knowledge of the approach's effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and on the characteristics of the community or group involved.

Health promotion is everyone's business

While it is clear that health services are a determinant of health, they are just one among many. Others include: environmental, social and economic conditions; access to education; the quality of the places where people live, learn, work and play; and community resilience and capacity.

Because many of these determinants of health lie outside the reach of the health sector, many of the actions to improve health also lie outside the health sector, both within and beyond government.

This means that many government departments and a wide range of people and organizations in communities and across society play a role in creating the conditions for good health that support individuals in adopting healthy lifestyles.

Promoting health and preventing diseases is everyone's business—individual Canadians, all levels of government, communities, researchers, the non-profit sector and the private sector each have a role to play.