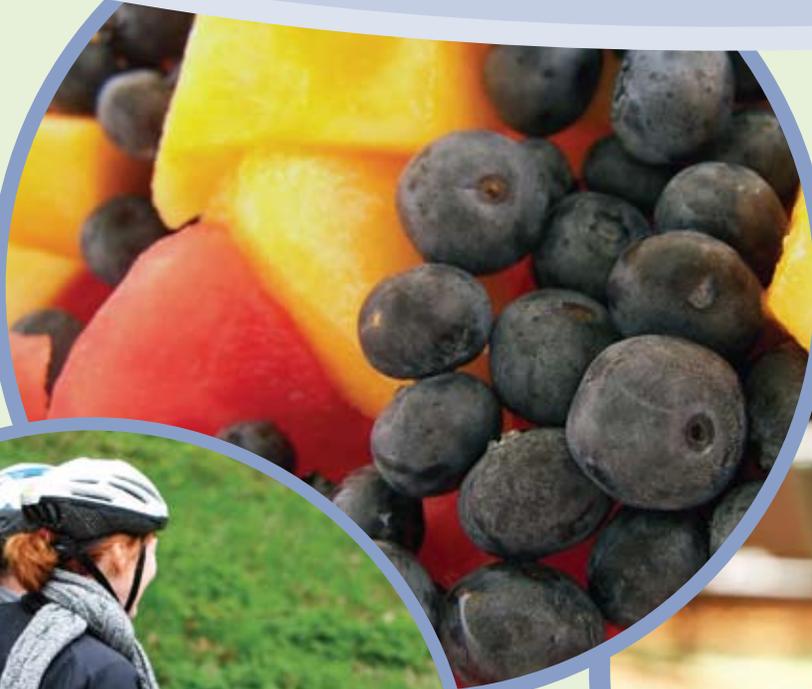




HEALTHY ALBERTA
COMMUNITIES

Building a Healthy Community: *Medicine Hat and Area*



Our Report to You

Healthy Alberta Communities is a five-year project, funded by Alberta Health and Wellness, and delivered by the Centre for Health Promotion Studies in the School of Public Health at the University of Alberta. Since 2005, we have been working with organizations and people in Alberta towns and cities to build communities that promote and support healthy living. Your community is one of four project communities. The purpose of this report is to tell you what your community has done to become a healthy Alberta community. **We're excited by the changes we have seen in Medicine Hat and area – and we want you to get excited too!**



The Healthy Alberta Communities Project

The purpose of *Healthy Alberta Communities* is to develop, implement and evaluate an approach to preventing chronic disease and improving health that has worked in other provinces and countries. Our goal is to create a uniquely Albertan approach that can be used by other communities across the province. To do that, we sponsor a community coordinator in Medicine Hat and area and provide “seed money” to invest in community activities and facilities that help make it easier to eat healthy, stop smoking and get active. This small investment has returned great dividends to your community!

Getting Started

In the first six months, the community coordinator got to know your community by listening to people, making connections, participating in events and investing in activities. With this solid grounding, the project hosted a community workshop to get people excited about *Healthy Alberta Communities*. The workshop brought together potential partners from municipal government, health region staff, community organizations and interested individuals. Together, we set out a road map that would take us to a healthier community.

Measuring the Baseline

In 2006, we did a telephone survey to learn more about the health of people in Medicine Hat and area. We also set up a clinic to measure height, weight and other health indicators of people who agreed to participate. Your community is using this information to set priorities and take action where it will make the most difference. Our team will also use these baseline measures to answer the question, “Did we make a difference?” (See pages 2-3: *The Measure of Health in Medicine Hat and Area*)

“Through a small investment of time and resources in the first year, *Healthy Alberta Communities* was able to spark community interest in incorporating a physical activity component into our annual celebration. With the expanded trail system, community members can now go further in their physical activity pursuits.”

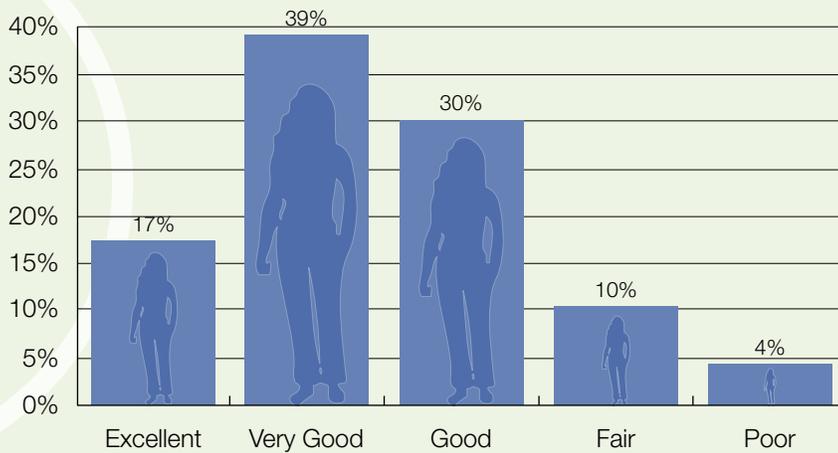
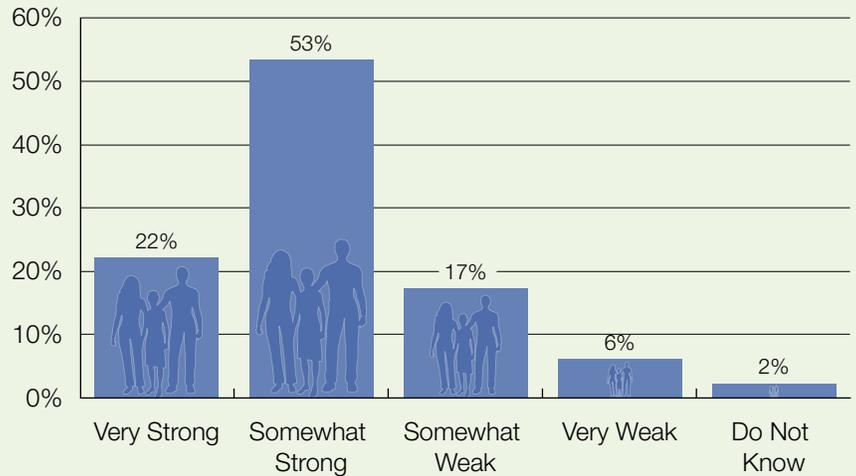
Community Services, Town of Redcliff



The Measure of Health in Medicine Hat and Area

Community Belonging

Most adults in Medicine Hat and area feel a strong sense of community belonging.

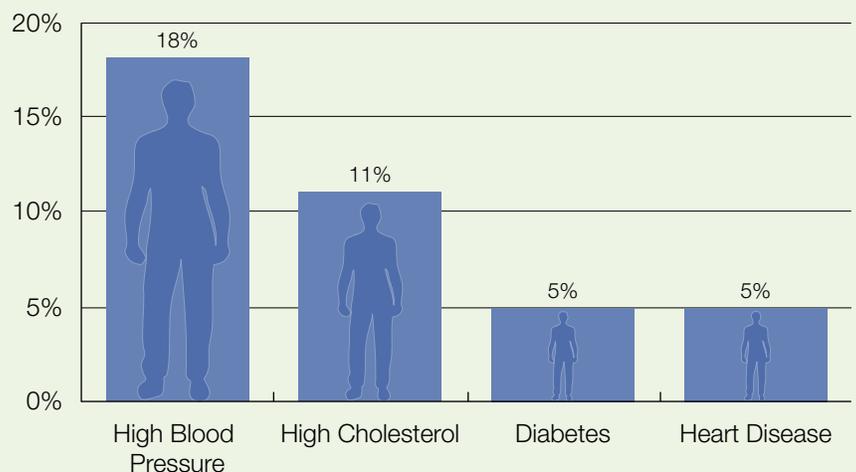


Self-Rated Health

Most adults in Medicine Hat and area rated their health as good, very good or excellent.

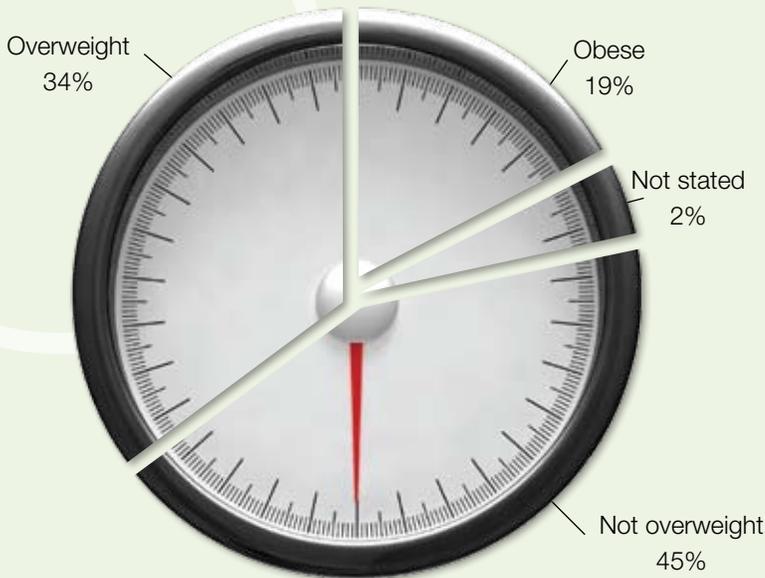
Self-Reported Chronic Disease

Almost one in five adults in Medicine Hat and area reported that they have high blood pressure, one in 10 reported high cholesterol, one in 20 reported diabetes and one in 20 reported heart disease.

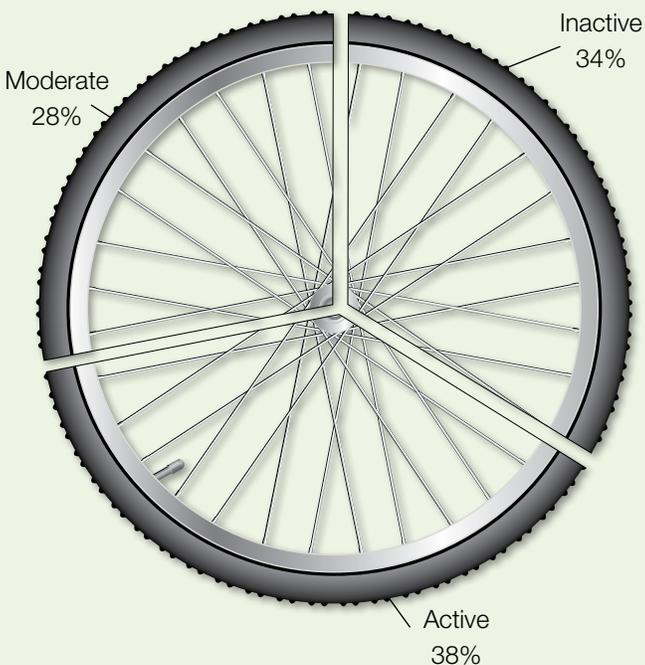


Risk Factors for Chronic Disease

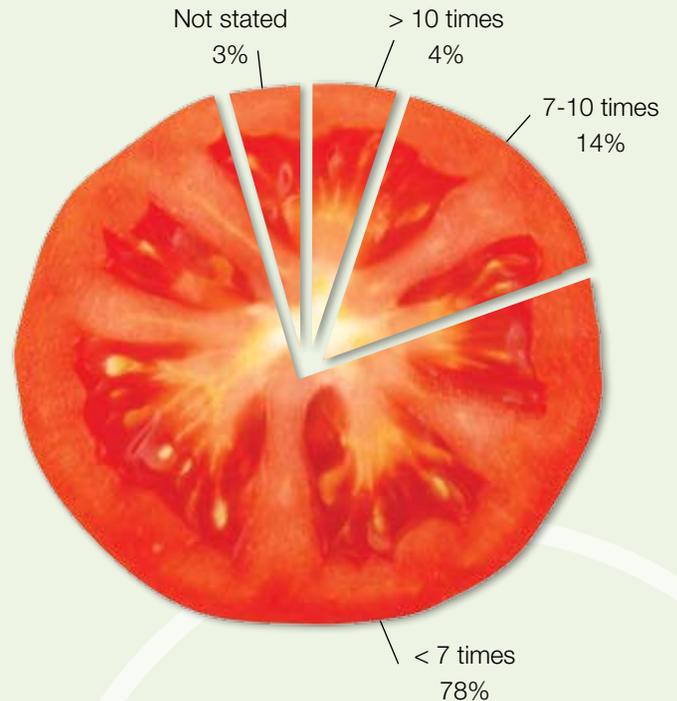
Over half (53%) of the adult population in Medicine Hat and area reported being overweight or obese, compared to 50.5% for the province as a whole (34.7% overweight, 15.8% obese).* Men appear to be more likely than women to report being overweight or obese and adults, 35-64, appear to be more likely than either young adults or seniors to report being obese.



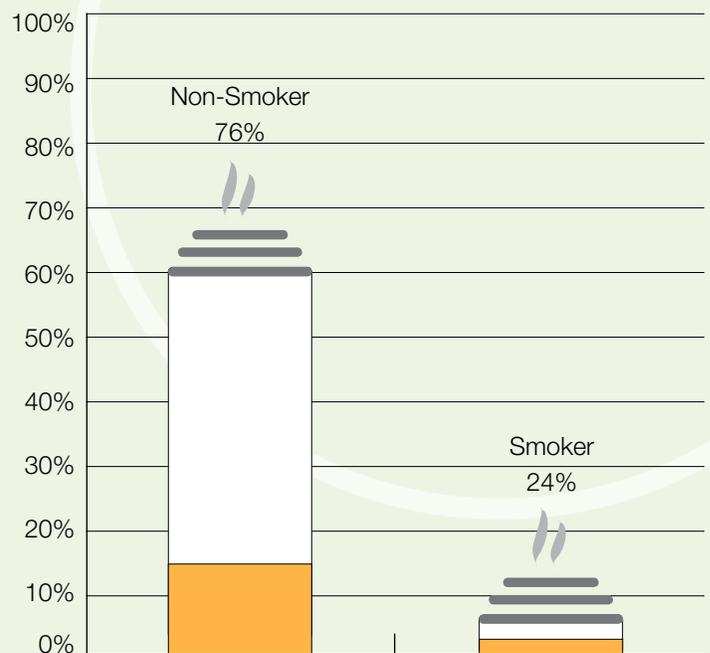
Two thirds of adults in Medicine Hat and area are moderately active or active. One in three adults is not active.



Most adults in Medicine Hat and area do not eat enough fruits and vegetables. Nearly one in five adults reported eating fruits and vegetables seven or more times a day.



Almost one in four adults in Medicine Hat and area smokes. Young adults, 18-34, and adults, 35-64, appear to be more likely than seniors to be smokers.



Setting Priorities

In 2007, *Healthy Alberta Communities* hosted a two-day priority setting workshop with community groups and organizations in Medicine Hat and area. The purpose of the workshop was to find out what was already working and what more could be done to promote healthier choices. Community participants set four main priorities:

- 1) Promote leisure activities that encourage people to get active, or "PLAY" (Physical Leisure Activities for You)
- 2) Increase access to fruits and vegetables at affordable prices.
- 3) Increase the capacity of social programs.
- 4) Promote alternative transportation, including walking and cycling.

Taking Action

It's not enough to simply tell people to "eat healthy," "stop smoking" and "get active." Rather, people need to live in communities where it is easy to make healthy choices. That means creating environments where people have the things they need to be healthy. *Healthy Alberta Communities* works to influence these key environments:



Physical – Do people have access to sidewalks, trails and facilities that make it easy to get active?



Economic – Does the community offer meaningful work? Can people make enough money to pay for healthy food?



Social – Do people have good friends and neighbours? Do they feel a strong sense of community belonging? Does the community offer social supports and services when people need them?



Political – Are there policies, laws and regulations in place that help create safe and healthy spaces in the community?

Here are some of the exciting ways your community is taking action on the determinants of health... and making it easier to make healthy choices!

Coalition for Active and Alternate Transportation: 2008-ongoing



- **Promote alternative transportation, including walking and cycling**
- **Promote leisure activities that encourage people to get active**

Healthy Alberta Communities was a key driver in setting up a coalition of community partners to develop and promote accessible and active transportation that lets people leave the car at home. The coalition encourages upgrades to sidewalks, trails, neighbourhood design and transit services to help break down barriers to using alternate transportation.

Community Gardens: 2005-ongoing



- **Increase access to fruits and vegetables**
- **Promote leisure activities that encourage people to get active**

Community Gardens are growing in Medicine Hat and Redcliff! These are public spaces where individuals and families come together to grow food – for themselves and others. There are now over 60 individual garden plots and more are sprouting up.

For more information, contact: Alberta Health Services–Paliser Health Region Nutrition Services at 403-502-8200

Food Talk: Community Food Assessment



- **Increase access to fruits and vegetables**
- **Increase the capacity of social programs**

Healthy Alberta Communities worked with social agencies and other interested groups to ask: is nutritious food available, accessible, affordable and acceptable to all people in our community? An ad hoc action committee – Using Local Produce – grew out of this assessment (see next page).

Isabel F. Cox School Community Kitchen		
  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to fruits and vegetables 	<p>Healthy Alberta Communities provided funding to build a community kitchen, as part of an overall renovation of Isabel F. Cox School. The kitchen will be used to teach students and their families how to cook and eat nutritious food. It will also be available to community groups, including new immigrants, who want to come together to socialize, improve their English and prepare healthy snacks for the students.</p>

Tobacco Cessation for Young Families: 2006-2008	
 	<p>Healthy Alberta Communities funded a 12-week tobacco cessation program to help families create healthier spaces for themselves and others. The funding provided by Healthy Alberta Communities was used to remove all barriers to participation by providing babysitting, food and transportation.</p>

Redcliff Improvement Partnerships: 2007-ongoing	
 	<p>Healthy Alberta Communities played a pivotal role in setting up a communication network that brings together agencies and organizations to share information, identify gaps and work together to improve their community.</p>

Using Local Produce	
 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to fruits and vegetables <p>The Using Local Produce action committee cultivated two separate projects to promote greater use of locally produced foods. The first – the Reusable Bag Project – gave out free reusable bags to make it easier to carry food home when you don't have a vehicle. A second project, sponsored by Growing Food Security in Alberta, is a directory of local growers and suppliers of food that is available throughout the community.</p>

Redcliff Mayor's Walk: 2006-2008	
 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote leisure activities that encourage people to get active <p>Healthy Alberta Communities, in partnership with Redcliff Community Services, helped to kick start the annual Mayor's Walk.</p>

Workplace Wellness: 2007	
 	<p>In partnership with Palliser Health Region and Be Fit for Life, Healthy Alberta Communities helped develop and deliver an 8-week Lunch-and-Learn program for one of Medicine Hat and area's major employers. The program taught skills for eating healthy, getting active and staying well.</p>

For information, contact: Redcliff Community Services at 403-548-3232

“Our involvement with Healthy Alberta Communities will have a long lasting effect on the direction of our programs and our community.”
Community Services Director, Town of Redcliff



Creating Connections

In Medicine Hat and area, Healthy Alberta Communities works with the following networks and coalitions, representing over 100 organization, agencies, government departments and individuals:

- Coalition for Active and Alternate Transportation
- Community Food Connections Association
- Community Response to Abuse and Neglect of Elders (CRANE)
- Crisis Assistance Network
- Health Connections Association
- Moving and Choosing to be Healthy
- Redcliff Improvement Partnerships
- Tobacco Reduction Coalition



Here's how you can get involved in building a healthy community in Medicine Hat and area!

- Use and enjoy the activities that are now available in your community, including community gardens, expanded trail systems and community kitchens.
- Support the exciting initiatives in this report by getting involved as a volunteer.
- Encourage your municipal government to make decisions and set policies that will support healthy living.
- Watch for opportunities to help set priorities for increasing healthy choices in your community.

"It has been very beneficial to have the assistance of a Healthy Alberta Communities community coordinator to pull various partners to the table to address and take action with some very important initiatives."

Coordinator, Be Fit for Life & Sport Development Centre



...and if you see "Healthy AB Cmty" on your caller ID, please answer the phone! We will be repeating the telephone survey and measurement clinics in Spring 2009 and want to hear from you.

For more information, visit:

www.healthyalbertacommunities.com

Or contact:

Tatjana Alvdj

Phone: 780-492-2064

Email: tatjana.alvdj-korenic@ualberta.ca





HAC's collaborative work in this region with many partners on projects such as Community Gardens, the Redcliff Improvement Project, and the Coalition for Active and Alternate Transportation means that we can now address the root causes of chronic disease in our communities and therefore effect long-term positive change for all our residents."

Canadian Cancer Society

Healthy Alberta Communities | Centre for Health Promotion Studies
School of Public Health | University of Alberta
1001 College Plaza | 8215 - 112 Street
Edmonton, Alberta | Canada T6G 2C8



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