

# Building health *from the ground up*

## What communities are doing to address healthy living

By Betty Kozak, PHEC, Health Promotion Coordinator, Assiniboine RHA

When you look around your community, what do you see? Do you see families out taking advantage of walking paths or trails? Are there healthier or lighter food choices available at the rink canteen or the local restaurant? Are there kids of all ages and backgrounds playing pick-up hockey? Are there vegetables growing nicely in the community garden? Do people come together to cook meals and then take the food home for their families to enjoy?

How do you build health from the ground up and have a community that supports healthy living? How do you make the healthy choice the easy choice? The good news is that communities can create environments where healthy options are more readily available close to home. There are simple ways for communities to take collective action to support health; the most effective being to involve community groups in the planning and design for public spaces, and lifestyle options. By supporting community members to come together around an idea and work together to find a solution, the results are often both practical and “homegrown.” Simple examples of supportive community

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Above: A student follows the clues as part of a CDPI event on the Langford trail.

action are: providing clear and smooth walking trails, linking existing walking paths, clearing outdoor skating spaces, offering free garden space, and having healthier food choices at the rink. When a community decides that they can build health from the ground up, they can influence people to look at their own personal health practices and make positive changes by eating healthier, being more active, finding ways to reduce stress and lead a tobacco free lifestyle.

Did you know that there are 11 communities in the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority looking at ways to support community wellbeing and the lifestyle issues?

Each of the following communities is involved in the Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative (CDPI): Shoal Lake, Erickson, Keeseekoowenin, Killarney, Minnedosa, Hamiota, Neepawa, Treherne, Rossburn, Virden and Waywayseecappo.




This outdoor skating rink is part of Killarney's CDPI initiative.

## What is CDPI?

CDPI is a collaborative initiative designed to prevent and manage chronic diseases such as diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular, kidney and respiratory disease, which are all major causes of illness, disability and death in Manitoba. The CDPI initiative is jointly funded by Manitoba Health/Healthy Living and the Public Health Agency of Canada and supported by the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority. Although the name of the project sounds like something you might find in a doctor's textbook, the initiative is about bringing community together to focus on the promotion and support of healthy lifestyle choices (e.g., healthy eating, active living and tobacco reduction).

Some of the local project ideas that communities are working on across the Assiniboine region include:

- Supporting healthy choices for youth e.g. hot meals or veggie snacks at schools, or new ways to be active;
- Promoting healthy eating at local events and in community cafeteria settings;
- Finding ways to partner with other local groups to promote physical activity opportunities (e.g., community walking challenges);
- Improving access to fruit & vegetables through community gardens;
- Linking different age groups together to learn new skills e.g. intergenerational dancing and cooking classes; and
- Creating environments to support active living (e.g., walking trails and skating ovals).

The work accomplished through the community CDPI committees allows people to actively design, develop and implement projects that work in their own community and impact positively on people's health. Community input and participation are essential to the success of the CDPI community projects. The work that communities are doing through CDPI supports change and improves the overall health of people living in our region. For further information regarding the CDPI initiative in Assiniboine Regional Health Authority, call **Pam Walker**, Public Health Program Manager at (204) 483-6220, or Health Promotion Coordinators: **Betty Kozak** at (204) 476-7843, **Melody Kowalchuk** at (204) 328-6215, or **Sherrill-Lee Hyra** at (204) 328-7541. 

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