



Health and Wellness

Emerging challenges and fresh responses

Health and wellness is one of the most important aspects of the well-being of individuals and societies. Almost everyone has a role in promoting health and wellness, including families, communities, governments, employers and people working in medicine. With global shifts like an aging population and changes in lifestyle, new health care challenges are emerging, such as mental illness, obesity, cancer and lung disease. At the same time, our needs, demands and expectations related to health and wellness are changing, as is our knowledge about how to best address these challenges. Globally, and in the Basin, we recognize the connections between our social and natural environments and our physical and mental health. People are putting a focus on new health-related technologies, prevention and early intervention, and new methods, professions, services and products that will support their well-being.

Note: This short research brief was informed by reports prepared for Columbia Basin Trust by [Stratos Inc.](#) This information is free to use in a way that is consistent with the intent of the original papers.

Understanding global trends

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The social determinants of health refer to the conditions in which we are born, grow up, live, work and age. Aspects like housing, employment, education, food security, loneliness and experiences with discrimination are largely responsible for the health of people around the world, and the world is taking more noticeⁱ. In 2012, member states of the World Health Organization adopted the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health; this means they committed to implementing this approach to public health and to encouraging national strategies that aim to reduce differences in health status or the distribution of health resources between groups of peopleⁱⁱ. Addressing inequality is also an important theme of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals—adopted in 2015—which address a number of social determinants of health.

What the research tells us

- ↳ About 50 per cent of the health status of a population is caused by social, economic and demographic factorsⁱⁱⁱ.
- ↳ While home to some of the healthiest people in the world, Canada also has health inequalities that are largely the result of social, political and economic disadvantages^{iv}.
- ↳ In BC, the health outcomes of Indigenous people are consistently worse than those of non-Indigenous people^v.

MENTAL HEALTH AND LONELINESS

About 700 million people around the world have a mental illness^{vi}, and current generations of young people are experiencing increased depression and anxiety^{vii}. There is also more loneliness, particularly in western developed nations^{viii}. Some research has suggested that loneliness and weak social connections impact the human lifespan about the same amount as obesity or smoking 15 cigarettes a day^{ix}.

What the research tells us

- ↳ Globally, depression and anxiety disorders increased by 54 per cent and 42 per cent respectively between 1990 and 2013^x.
- ↳ In any given year, one in five Canadians struggles with mental health^{xi}.
- ↳ BC residents rate their mental health as nearly the lowest in the country, despite generally healthy lifestyles^{xii}.

21ST CENTURY HEALTH CHALLENGES

At a time when people are living longer than ever, they're also suffering from a rise in chronic diseases and conditions like cancer, heart disease and diabetes^{xiii}. These 21st-century diseases are linked to our longevity, changing diets, new activity patterns, tobacco and alcohol consumption and environmental stressors. They're also impacting global health and the ability of health systems to keep up with demand.

What the research tells us

- ↳ Physical inactivity is the fourth highest risk factor associated with death and is responsible for 3.2 million deaths each year^{xiv}.
- ↳ The rate of obesity is higher in Canada than in most other developed nations and expected to continue rising until at least 2030^{xvixvii}.
- ↳ The rate of cancer in BC is expected to increase by 57 per cent between 2012 and 2030^{xviii}.

APPROACHES TO WELL-BEING

Globally, individuals and institutions are approaching well-being and health care in new ways in response to modern challenges and a better understanding of health. Preventative measures that reduce risk factors and alter our behaviours include exercise, healthy eating, adequate sleep and stress reduction^{xix}. Additionally, approaches to how practitioners care for patients are changing; for example, there is a trend toward patients being more involved in decisions about their health^{xx}. Also, health teams may be composed of a broader range of people, like clinical providers, social workers, dieticians and physiotherapists^{xxi}. At the same time, the "wellness economy"—products like fitness trackers, services like mindfulness apps and destinations like spas and retreats—is estimated at \$4.2 trillion US globally and is rising five times as fast as global economic growth^{xxii}.

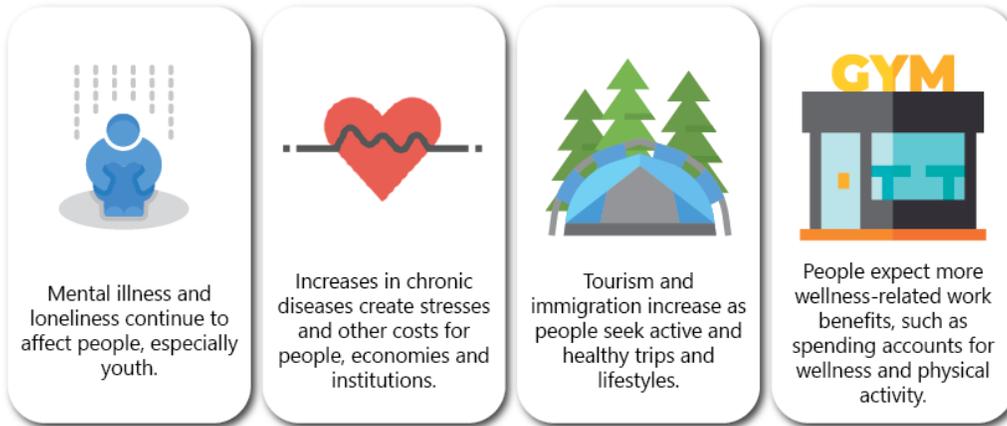
What the research tells us

- ↳ Around the world, wellness tourism grew nearly 7 per cent a year between 2015 and 2017 to \$639 billion US—more than twice as fast as tourism overall^{xxiii}.
- ↳ BC recently launched a tourism campaign that taps into the growing research around the benefits of spending time in nature^{xxiv}.

What could this mean for the Basin?

The Basin is a great place to live: home to awe-inspiring natural spaces and endowed with natural resources, a strong economy and a quality of life that draws residents and visitors alike. As the Basin faces global challenges like chronic diseases and mental illness, it must build on its strengths to continue to support and sustain the health and wellness of its people.

Here are some of the impacts the Basin may experience in coming years:



The icons are: 1. A person sitting with their head in their hands, representing mental health. 2. A red heart with a black ECG line, representing chronic diseases. 3. A blue tent pitched in a forest of green trees, representing tourism. 4. A black building with a yellow 'GYM' sign and a blue door, representing gyms.

Mental illness and loneliness continue to affect people, especially youth.

Increases in chronic diseases create stresses and other costs for people, economies and institutions.

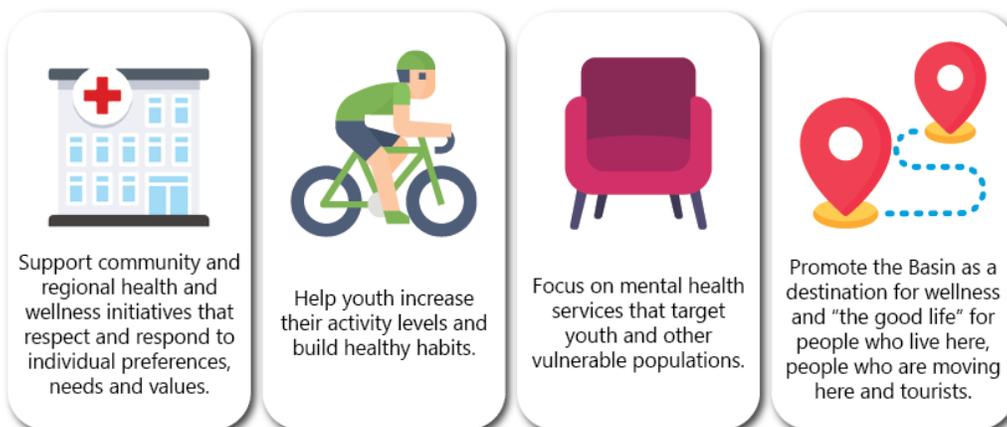
Tourism and immigration increase as people seek active and healthy trips and lifestyles.

People expect more wellness-related work benefits, such as spending accounts for wellness and physical activity.

New global approaches about how societies think about and promote public health are disrupting old notions of health care. In many ways, the Basin is well placed to take advantage of these changes, with an abundance of opportunities for physical activity, natural spaces and local agriculture. Still, continuing to promote the health and wellness of communities will require investments, smart planning and collaborative efforts.

How can the potential impacts be addressed?

There are many ways people and organizations in the Basin can adapt to situations like those mentioned above. Here are a few ideas.



The icons are: 1. A white building with a red cross, representing health initiatives. 2. A person riding a green bicycle, representing youth activity. 3. A purple armchair, representing mental health services. 4. Three red location pins connected by a blue dotted line, representing wellness promotion.

Support community and regional health and wellness initiatives that respect and respond to individual preferences, needs and values.

Help youth increase their activity levels and build healthy habits.

Focus on mental health services that target youth and other vulnerable populations.

Promote the Basin as a destination for wellness and "the good life" for people who live here, people who are moving here and tourists.

RURAL HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE

Rural health can be affected by social and economic factors, isolation and transportation challenges, and low populations spread over large geographic areas^{xxv}. Cancer, heart disease, respiratory disease, mental illness and substance use disorders are generally more common in rural and remote communities than in cities^{xxvi}. To help the situation, the national Canadian Collaborative Taskforce's Rural Roadmap for Action directs medical schools and physicians to find better ways to address health challenges in rural and Indigenous communities and suggests more research be done to improve care in these regions^{xxvii}.

While relatively healthy, the Basin isn't immune from this rural-health reality. In 2018, the Basin saw four causes of death that were higher than provincial rates: chronic lung disease, alcohol-related deaths, suicide and motor vehicle accidents^{xxviii}. On the flip side, people in the Basin report fairly high personal well-being and practise healthy habits, including exercising and eating healthy foods. Still, there may be other social determinants that impact their health and require closer attention^{xxix}.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Income, education and social connection all impact the health and well-being of people in the Basin. The Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute's State of the Basin Report gives us a glimpse into these and other factors:

- ↳ In 2016, 15 per cent of people in the Basin were considered low income.
- ↳ Student enrollment has been decreasing at public post-secondary institutions in the region.
- ↳ Seventy per cent of people in the Basin believe they "have friends or family they can rely on during a time of need," which is similar to national averages^{xxx}.

In the Basin, health care services and investments are paying attention to these and other social determinants. For example, the Kootenay Boundary Division of Family Practice offers health care practitioners a tool to assess the impacts of poverty on patients' health and another to learn about patients' traumatic childhood experiences^{xxxi}. The Safe Kids & Youth Coordinated Response program responds to child and youth abuse through a team of health care providers, police, child protection

services, the Crown counsel, victim services, schools and community services^{xxxii}.

Other organizations are striving to address issues like reducing poverty and strengthening social connections. There are also deliberate efforts to integrate different cultures and ways of knowing when it comes to health through partnerships between the BC Public Health Authority, the First Nations Health Authority, Métis Nation BC and Indigenous peoples in the province.

WELLNESS DESTINATION

The Basin's natural spaces, services and amenities offer a way of life that supports the health and wellness of its people, creates a vibrant tourism industry and acts as a draw for people looking to relocate^{xxxiii}^{xxxiv}. After the retail and wholesale industries, the health care and social assistance sectors employ the second highest number of people in the Basin and the province^{xxxv}.

The Basin's assets and economies align well with the types of wellness experiences that both locals and tourists want. Continuing to invest in and promote aspects that improve the well-being of locals and attract people to the Basin will bolster its reputation as a destination for wellness and quality of life. Basin communities are already developing strategies to become wellness destinations^{xxxvi}. For example, the Columbia Valley is working to make it easier for people to get to and get around the valley, create an attractive climate for tourism businesses and protect the natural environment^{xxxvii}.

Linkages

RELATED TREND PAPERS

- Toward a sustainable economy
- The environment
- New technology
- Lives and communities
- A globalized world



Trends in health and wellness **influence**:

Shifting demographics

Health care systems may face additional pressures due to aging populations and their health challenges.

Demand for jobs and skills

Increased demand in the wellness economy may lead to shifting needs for jobs and skills.

Connectivity

The wellness economy is driving the emergence of new health-related technologies linked to mobile devices.



Trends in health and wellness are **influenced by**:

Increases in extreme weather

Increases in extreme weather events could worsen health conditions. For example, wildfires can cause poor air quality, which can affect individuals with respiratory issues like asthma.

Big, open data

More data could make monitoring personal well-being easier, changing behaviours and the delivery of health care.

Moving to cities

Urbanization could promote more sedentary lifestyles, which could lead to a greater incidence of obesity, diabetes and other costly health conditions.



Trends in health and wellness are **counter to**:

Emerging biological threats

Vaccine hesitancy or avoidance (the "anti-vaxxer" movement) is impacting the health of populations.

Shifting demographics

People are living longer than ever, but also suffering from a rise in chronic diseases and conditions like cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

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