

Thank you for providing this opportunity for Islanders to have a voice in the Government of Canada's pre-budget consultation process.

In this presentation, Health Within Holistic Centre which has been operating in Charlottetown Prince Edward Island since 2008 recommends that the Government of Canada consider reforms to Canada's healthcare strategy that will support Canadians in their efforts to choose healthy life-long behaviours.

In calling for a pro-active management of lifestyles in order for Islanders to be healthier, more productive and less dependent on medical services, it is Health Within Holistic Centre's belief that the Government of Prince Edward Island's discussion paper on Health and Wellness titled "**Towards a Culture of Wellness**" is setting the stage for innovative policies, practices and programs that will contribute to Islanders' health and vitality as well as reduce preventable disease on Prince Edward Island.

"**Towards A Culture Of Wellness**" states that wellness is the **integration of body, mind and spirit**. This definition resonates well with a more holistic approach to health and wellness so, as a team of holistic health practitioners, Health Within Holistic Centre trusts that the Government of Canada will collaborate with the Government of Prince Edward Island in supporting Canadians on their journey to improving their personal health and well-being.

Sometimes, clients who approach Health Within Holistic Centre have become dependent on the health system's medical services and are seeking alternative approaches to successfully improve their health and well-being.

Further to our collective experience in support of a holistic health approach to healthy living, it is our view that there are cost-effective alternatives to traditional healthcare services. In this regard, learning how to pro-actively manage lifestyles and habits in order to become healthier, more productive, more resilient and less dependent on medical services is critically important.

In Prince Edward Island's "**Towards A Culture Of Wellness**" discussion paper, background information is provided on five specific areas that impact wellness including 1) positive mental wellness, 2) being active, 3) living tobacco free, 4) eating well and 5) using alcohol responsibly.

As holistic health practitioners, we will focus our health strategy feedback on what we consider to be a vital foundation for overall health, that is, healthy eating, an active lifestyle as well as positive mental health and psychological well-being especially in relation to the development of good coping skills in managing stress.

As stated in "**Towards A Culture Of Wellness**", good physical health and good mental health don't exist in isolation. Over the years, Health Within Holistic health practitioners have observed the encouraging results of raising awareness and understanding of alternative, non-drug, healing modalities coupled with personal empowerment as people engage in adopting healthier lifestyle choices and coping skills.

A Whole New Way to Prevent Illness

Our community's understanding of what causes chronic illness has changed over the past decade. Increasingly, researchers are finding that the underlying causes of most chronic diseases are lifestyle factors that '**we control**'. The way we live – what we eat, the amount of stress we're under (and how we choose to deal with stress), what we do with our leisure time – are all significant factors that impact on our health and well-being.

Researchers are finding that having healthy relationships is extremely important to health. With this deep connection between health and emotional well-being, holistic health practitioners at Health Within Holistic Centre believe that the practice of stress-relief techniques is very beneficial to health. In fact, mental stress, conflict and depression seem to drive many unhealthy physical habits and practices such as getting too little sleep, being too sedentary, eating junk food as well as addiction.

An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth A Pound Of Cure

When a person gets sick, they usually place themselves in the hands of the healthcare system in which some people get well and some people get sicker. Medications can cause unwanted side effects and, in Canada, it is our understanding that a little over 50% of the population uses at least one prescription medication and approximately 40 percent of seniors take four or more prescription medications.

Health Within Holistic Centre's approach to prevention and to treat illnesses is to encourage alternative non-drug therapies. Finding inspiration for our daily lives and taking our minds off our worries are issues related to emotional well-being that have led many holistic health practitioners to become aware of relaxation techniques that may be as beneficial as taking medication in improving well-being.

Prevention Strategies – A Shared Responsibility

Many of the illnesses people face today are almost entirely preventable. We hold the power to prevent illness and live a long, happier, healthy life. However, even though some Islanders know what it takes to live a healthy lifestyle, some don't seem to make an effort to eat well, to exercise or to practice healthy ways to control their stress. In addition, with the healthcare system focussed on the care of patients who are already sick, doctors don't often have enough time to provide illness prevention advice and support.

Given this situation, it is our view that a process of education and change will enable Canadian society to move from "a culture of dependency on the healthcare system" to "**a culture of personal empowerment**" in choosing healthy lifestyle behaviours that Canadian citizens can control for themselves.

The Power Of Lifestyle Changes

The following are a few examples of alternative illness prevention and treatment that could increase healthy choices and reduce the need for drugs:

- 1) Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease – a plan that combines a very low-fat vegetarian diet with a tailored exercise program, meditation, smoking cessation and group therapy;
- 2) A study was conducted with adults from ages 55 to 90 who had mild cognitive impairment. Researchers found that participants in a mindfulness meditation course had less evidence of atrophy in the hippocampus area of the brain, which primarily controls memory, compared with a control group that didn't meditate (Source: Neuroscience Letters, October 10, 2013)

Working Together In Setting A New Course

While acknowledging that <changing behaviour is difficult>, the "**Towards A Culture Of Wellness**" discussion paper notes that "**learning healthy behaviours and coping skills early in life leads to a greater likelihood of being well in adulthood**". Supporting the learning of healthy behaviours and coping skills is a critically important aspect of Health Within Holistic Centre's **focus on education, empowerment and prevention.**

Health Within Holistic Centre encourages the Government of Canada to:

- 1) foster **increased collaboration amongst all healthcare providers**. This concerted approach to promoting health and wellness and preventing illness would require a closer working relationship between medical professionals and alternative healthcare practitioners who could play a greater role in the area of education and prevention including support for stress management;
- 2) support holistic health practitioners in working with **the school system** to teach stress management and emotional well-being techniques to students and teachers, from pre-school to postsecondary levels, allowing for a lifetime mastery of the benefits of these techniques;
- 3) support holistic health practitioners in **working with seniors** to help them learn breathing and movement techniques as well as visualizations that will provide for a more active day and a restful sleep instead of relying on prescription medication.

Thank you

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