

## Healthy Policies Promote Healthy Hearts

Maintaining and improving our health and the health of our loved ones is important. There are memories to make, projects to complete, and relationships to savor. Thankfully, the Heart and Stroke Foundation tells us there is much about our personal health that is within our control. If we do not smoke, control our use of alcohol, manage our weight, engage in regular physical activity, and learn to manage stress, the likelihood of having heart problems decreases dramatically. This is good news!

Our personal routines and habits play an important role in keeping us healthy but most of us also need support and encouragement from those around us. I never learned to meditate until I had a friend invite me to take a course with her. And that same friend never used to swim but now comes to the pool with me every week! But it's not just about social support. Policies that promote healthier foods and environments help create healthier people. Our environments play a big role in our ability to adopt healthy habits and stick with them.

Many local governments around British Columbia are passing smoke-free bylaws. Communities such as Salmon Arm, Revelstoke, and Penticton have all passed bylaws that restrict smokers from lighting up in parks, sports fields, and playgrounds. Perhaps surprisingly, research is showing that smokers are among the people that support these bylaws the most. By creating more smoke free environments we reduce the risks of second hand smoke and reduce the likelihood the next generation will see smoking as socially acceptable.

Policies that target the food industry can also improve health. A recent study concluded people who get 25 per cent or more of their daily calories from added sugar are three times more likely to die of heart disease. Reducing added sugar in foods can help reduce the risk of heart disease; that's why the Canadian Medical Association, the Childhood Obesity Foundation, and the Canadian Institute for Health Research are all calling for regulations on the amount of sugar the food industry can add to items like pop, juice, and cereal.

Healthy policies like these make it easier for us all to make healthier choices. Heart disease is largely avoidable when we all do our parts – both individually and together.

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Date: February 18, 2014