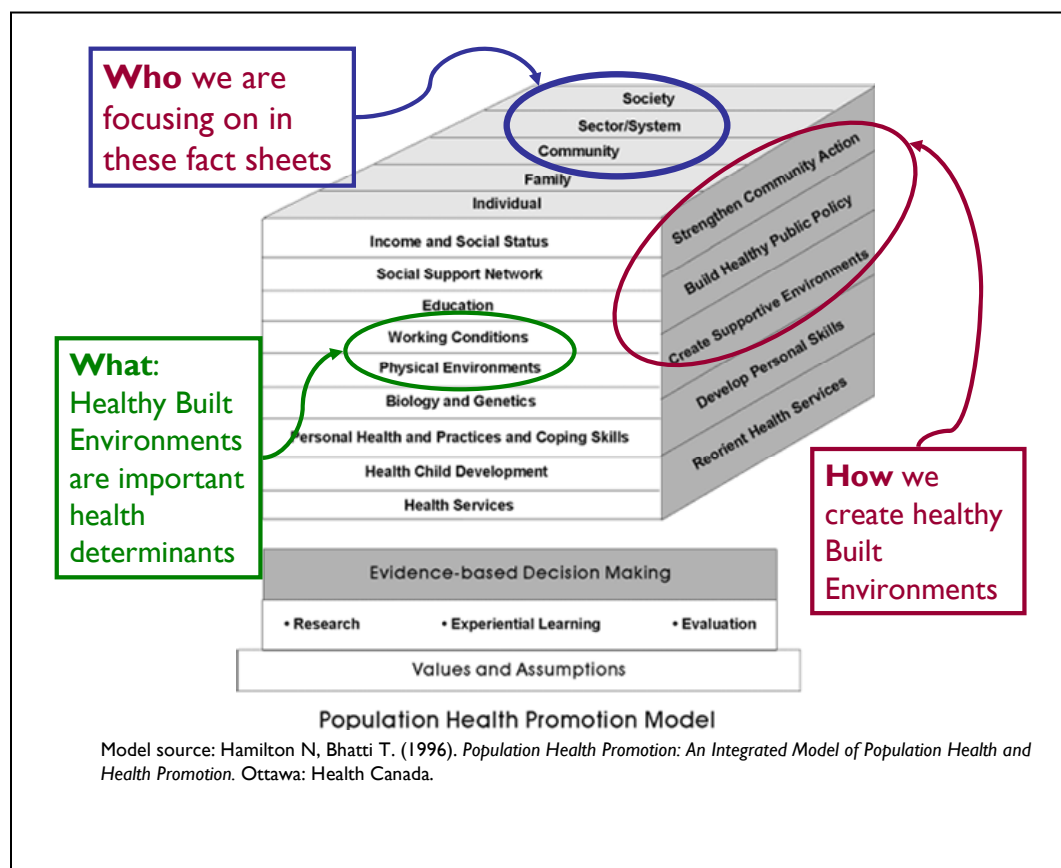




## Fact Sheets for Promoting Healthy Built Environments



This set of fact sheets provides an overview of Healthy Built Environment issues for Environmental Health professionals (EHPs include public health inspectors, environmental health officers, and medical health officers). The aim is to help EHPs collaborate with other stakeholders to promote a Healthy Built Environment (HBE).

As shown in Figure 1, HBE work affects several domains of population health promotion. We focus on three strategies: advocate, enable, and collaborate as a simple approach to get started with HBE work.

This guide refers to several key concerns:

- Lack of physical activity;
- Unsafe streets;
- Unsafe neighbourhoods;
- Polluted air, soil and water;
- Affordable housing;
- Social isolation.

Each fact sheet links health effects to built environment features and potential steps for collaborative action. Most action steps benefit more than one concern.

Further resources are available at the [National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health](#) and at B.C.'s [Provincial Health Services Authority](#).

Figure 1: The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion creates a context for working on Healthy Built Environments

## Lack of Physical Activity

Potential effects on health	Relation to built environment	Collaborative action steps for environmental health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cancer</li> <li>• Cardiac disease</li> <li>• Diabetes</li> <li>• Hypertension</li> <li>• Obesity</li> <li>• Stress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access to parks or school grounds</li> <li>• Parks unsafe or poorly equipped and maintained</li> <li>• Neighbourhood safety affects use of parks (e.g., dogs, anti-social behaviour)</li> <li>• Air and water pollution limit outdoor activity</li> <li>• Lack of shade and rest areas in public places</li> <li>• Active transport not a safe or efficient option for commuting to school or work</li> </ul>	<p><u>Advocate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide data for decision-makers about built environment effects on physical activity, e.g., access to parks and neighbourhood “walkability”.</li> <li>• Encourage mixed use, high-density developments with preference towards infill and redevelopment of urban areas.</li> </ul> <p><u>Collaborate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a role for environmental health in planning processes.</li> <li>• Work with schools and Parks &amp; Recreation to improve access to safe, well-maintained parks and recreation facilities.</li> <li>• Work with planners and developers to link LEED standards, active transportation and real estate issues.</li> </ul> <p><u>Enable</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with law enforcement, animal control, and neighbourhood watch groups to make physical activity safe.</li> <li>• Educate and work with school boards and employers to promote safe routes for active transportation, including facilities for storage and clean-up.</li> </ul>



Unsafe Streets		
Potential effects on health	Relation to built environment	Collaborative action steps for environmental health practitioners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Injuries and fatalities</li> <li>• Inactivity and associated health risks, e.g., obesity</li> <li>• Stress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Street designs that promote auto use lead to high traffic speed and congestion, noise pollution, and risks for pedestrians and cyclists</li> <li>• Limited amenities for pedestrians, wheelchairs and strollers, e.g., walkways, crosswalks, and pedestrian islands</li> <li>• Bicycle lanes and bicycle parking not available.</li> <li>• Absence of buffer zone for non-automobile travel</li> <li>• Active transport not a safe or efficient option for commuting to school or work</li> </ul>	<p><u>Advocate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help decision-makers see the link between safety of streets and health.</li> <li>• Advocate better road and sidewalk safety for all users, including pedestrians and wheelchair and bike users.</li> <li>• Promote policies that require developers to build safe streets (especially if they are receiving development incentives).</li> <li>• Advocate the inclusion of public health criteria in local design guidelines and community plans.</li> </ul> <p><u>Collaborate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a role for environmental health in planning processes.</li> <li>• Partner with insurers and law enforcement agencies to identify and problem-solve high-risk locations.</li> <li>• Work with municipal engineering departments to ensure sidewalks are well maintained and free of debris, snow, and falling hazards.</li> </ul> <p><u>Enable</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote monitoring and enforcement to ensure safe streets around parks or open spaces used for physical activity.</li> <li>• Educate and work with adjacent municipalities to coordinate interdisciplinary planning for street safety measures.</li> </ul>



## Unsafe Neighbourhoods

Potential effects on health	Relation to built environment	Collaborative action steps for environmental health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inactivity and associated health risks, e.g., obesity</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Social isolation</li> <li>• Violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access to parks or safe places to play or socialize</li> <li>• Limited access to community services, e.g., sport and recreation, schools, banks, food retailers, health services</li> <li>• Avoidance of public transit due to safety concerns</li> <li>• Neglected buildings indicate that “nobody cares” about local behaviour</li> <li>• Neighbourhoods segregated by income or ethnicity</li> <li>• Concentration of alcohol outlets (stores and bars)</li> </ul>	<p><u>Advocate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate planners and decision-makers about community design and its impact on health and safety.</li> <li>• Promote planning, land-use and public transportation that improve access to essential services for disadvantaged families.</li> <li>• Identify health and safety problems caused by location of alcohol outlets.</li> </ul> <p><u>Collaborate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with community policing, merchants’ associations, and neighbourhood watch groups to gather data, develop proposals, and influence policies that reduce crime and make neighbourhoods safe.</li> <li>• Work with schools and Parks &amp; Recreation to improve access to safe, well-maintained parks and recreation facilities, especially for after-school programs in underserved areas.</li> <li>• Work with seniors’ programs and developers to improve access to housing for residents of different ages and economic status.</li> </ul> <p><u>Enable</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote policies supporting and requiring owners to clean up neglected properties.</li> <li>• Promote crime prevention through environmental design methods, such as, elimination of hiding spots, landscaping trees and shrubs, and increased lighting.</li> <li>• Participate in community and economic development programs to foster new commercial and industrial development.</li> </ul>

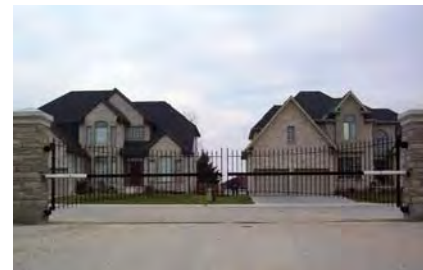
## Polluted Air, Soil, and Water

Potential effects on health	Relation to built environment	Collaborative action steps for environmental health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asthma</li> <li>• Cancer</li> <li>• Cardiac disease</li> <li>• Neurological disorders</li> <li>• Reproductive disorders</li> <li>• Skin disorders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools, housing, parks, etc located close to sources of air pollution</li> <li>• Lack of green space or trees to filter air pollution</li> <li>• Drinking and recreational water is poor quality</li> <li>• Water runoff contributes to soil pollution</li> <li>• Contaminated soils from traffic and industrial activity affect horticulture and recreation</li> </ul>	<p><u>Advocate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide data for decision-makers about sensitive sites near transportation routes and industrial facilities.</li> <li>• Share air and water quality data with community groups and enforcement agencies.</li> <li>• Advocate for and participate in health impact assessments.</li> <li>• Encourage the reduction of traffic air pollution through the promotion of active transportation, anti-idling by-laws, etc.</li> </ul> <p><u>Collaborate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a role for environmental health in local greenhouse gas reduction plans.</li> <li>• Work with unions, workers' compensation.</li> </ul> <p><u>Enable</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect people in daycares, schools, work sites, and homes from indoor and outdoor air pollution as well as contaminants such as asbestos, lead, and radon.</li> </ul>



## Poor Quality and Unaffordable Housing

Potential effects on health	Relation to built environment	Collaborative action steps for environmental health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High stress</li> <li>• Social isolation</li> <li>• Psychosocial effects due to displacement or homelessness</li> <li>• Asthma and respiratory illness</li> <li>• Communicable disease</li> <li>• Skin disorders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable housing requires long commutes</li> <li>• New developments too expensive for neighbourhood residents leading to higher rents and evictions</li> <li>• Unhealthy construction practices and materials</li> <li>• Poor maintenance</li> <li>• Poor indoor air quality</li> <li>• Overcrowding</li> </ul>	<p><u>Advocate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess health impact of displacement, relocation, and foreclosure.</li> <li>• Educate decision-makers about how poor housing and instability affect physical and psychosocial health.</li> </ul> <p><u>Collaborate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with housing societies, housing authorities, affordable housing advocacy groups, non-profit and for-profit developers and tenants' rights groups to attract appropriate new housing and mixed-use projects.</li> <li>• Work with social service agencies, municipal planners, and stakeholder groups to develop a local Homelessness Prevention Strategy.</li> <li>• Participate in health impact assessments of proposed housing developments.</li> </ul> <p><u>Enable</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with municipal officials to ensure health-protective aspects of building codes are applied (e.g., indoor air quality) to new buildings.</li> <li>• Participate in Safe Housing committees that encourage and assist landlords of low-income buildings to economically upgrade to safety codes.</li> </ul>





Social Isolation		
Potential effects on health	Relation to built environment	Collaborative action steps for environmental health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Psychosocial distress and mental illness</li> <li>• Vulnerability to natural disasters and epidemics</li> <li>• Substance misuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long commuting distances (including travel to school for children in rural areas)</li> <li>• Lack of access to essential services</li> <li>• Absence of safe public places to socialize or gather</li> <li>• Lack of access to convenient public transit</li> <li>• Unsightly settings dominated by graffiti, billboards, industrial development, or transportation corridors</li> </ul>	<p><u>Advocate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map access to public gathering places, essential services and amenities, e.g., schools and recreation programs.</li> <li>• Provide data for decision-makers about the link between social inclusion and social support and public health.</li> </ul> <p><u>Collaborate</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a role for environmental health in planning processes that tackle social issues.</li> <li>• Work with non-profit groups, libraries, schools, and Parks &amp; Recreation to make cultural and recreational facilities feel safe for community gatherings.</li> </ul> <p><u>Enable</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with community policing, neighbourhood watch, and service clubs to reduce graffiti, abandoned cars, garbage-dumping, and other anti-social behaviour which contributes to crime, fear of crime, and a degraded environment.</li> <li>• Educate neighbourhood residents about organizing themselves so they can participate in planning processes to address local issues.</li> </ul>



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