

# Community Development in Action

*A Profile of Community Developers  
in Vancouver Community Health Services*



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## Executive summary

**E**xtensive evidence shows that health is deeply influenced by social, economic and physical contexts. These factors are known as the social determinants of health. Health promotion is an upstream investment that takes action on these determinants to address the root causes of illness, easing the pressure on downstream investments such as acute care to create a more balanced and sustainable health system (Dovell, 2006).

The Ottawa Charter (WHO, 1986) identified community development as a key approach to health promotion, emphasizing the need to work in partnership across sectors and with communities to address local issues and to strengthen the environments in which people live, work and play.

One of the ways Vancouver Coastal Health maintains a commitment to the realm of health promotion is through the work of Community Developers (CDs) situated in Community Health Services in Vancouver. CDs focus on addressing the determinants of health with the goal of reducing health inequities and improving the overall health of the population.

To help frame their work, CDs use the following five strategies:

- **STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY CAPACITY:** Supporting residents and community organizations to respond to local health needs.
- **IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES AND INFORMATION:** Enabling individuals and service providers to access resources that help people get well and stay healthy.

*One of the ways Vancouver Coastal Health maintains a commitment to the realm of health promotion is through the work of Community Developers.*



- **ENHANCING PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS:** Integrating community development within the health system to strengthen its capacity to promote health and wellness.
- **BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS:** Creating connections that encourage and enable people and organizations to work together to address health needs.
- **CREATING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS:** Fostering physical and social contexts that promote healthy lives.

CDs collaborate with many stakeholders to develop and advocate for services and policies that promote health and strengthen communities. CD initiatives complement and support the work of other staff engaged in population and community health, helping to create a more effective, accessible and responsive public health system.



**Community Developers develop and advocate for services and policies that promote health and strengthen communities.**



# Vision statement and mission statement

## VCH Vision Statement

Vancouver Coastal Health is committed to supporting healthy lives in healthy communities with our partners through care, education and research.

## VC Community Developers' Mission Statement

Community Developers in Vancouver Community Health Services are focused on addressing the social determinants of health with the goal of reducing health inequities and improving the overall health of people in Vancouver.

Providing expertise in community development, Community Developers collaborate with staff, residents, organizations and government agencies to develop and advocate for services, policies and projects that promote health, strengthen communities and create a more accessible and responsive public health system.

***Community Developers collaborate with staff, residents, organizations and government agencies.***



# Introduction

## Purpose of the profile

This profile was created by the Community Developers (CDs) in Vancouver Community Health Services to clarify their role and to describe the main strategies that they use in their work. The first part of the document provides an overview of community development and CDs. The second part provides an overview of CD strategies, each of which is illustrated with a case example. Through this, the CDs aim to increase awareness of the scope of CD work, its connection to the health care system and how it feeds into the creation of healthy communities.

## What is community development?

Community development is the process of helping a community strengthen itself and develop towards its full potential to improve people's lives. Community development can be both a means to an end or an end in itself. Exact definitions of community development vary, but they typically include the following principles:

### Community development...

- Addresses issues that have been identified by the community
- Is inclusive, collaborative and action-oriented
- Builds upon the skills and strengths within a community

“Community development emphasizes the importance of working with people, not doing things for people. At its heart, it is about encouraging people to discover their resources and possibilities in order to work for positive change in their community” (Godfrey, 1985).

**Community development is the process of helping a community strengthen itself and develop towards its full potential to improve people's lives.**





### What is community?

Community refers to a group of people who identify as having some characteristics in common such as similar health concerns, religion, age or culture.

Communities may or may not be bounded by geographic areas and, while they are often imagined to be homogeneous groups sharing similar interests and needs, communities are often internally diverse with varied priorities.

### What does community development have to do with health care?

Acute care and clinical services are an important part of the health care system, but they can only be economically sustained if more emphasis is placed on keeping people healthy and on addressing the root causes of poor health.

Most experts agree that health care interventions only contribute about 10 to 15% to health outcomes (Baker, 2005). This finding is echoed in the Canadian Senate Report on the Federal Role in Health Care which states that 75% of Canadians' health is determined by physical, social and economic environments (Kirby, 2002). These factors are known as the social determinants of health (see next page). The social determinants of health structure lifestyle choices, interact with each other, and together are the best predictors of individual and population health (Raphael, 2003).

Populations and individuals who are disadvantaged by one or more of the social determinants of health tend to suffer disproportionately from poor health outcomes and experience difficulties in accessing health services. These inequities of health substantially contribute to higher health care costs and other social burdens. The World Health Organization confirms that addressing the social determinants of health through good, targeted and universal policies, programs and structures can effectively improve the health of the whole population and reduce health inequities.



**75% of Canadians' health is determined by physical, social and economic environments. These factors are known as the social determinants of health (Kirby, 2002).**



Community development addresses the social determinants of health by working in partnership across sectors and with communities to address local issues, create access to services and strengthen the environments in which people live, work and play. Community development in health can take place at the grassroots, in neighbourhoods or communities, and also at an organizational level in policy, planning and service delivery.

***Community development addresses the social determinants of health by working in partnership across sectors and with communities.***

### **Social Determinants of Health**

- Education & literacy
- Employment & working conditions
- Ethnicity & cultural identity
- Food security
- Gender & sexual identity
- Income & social status
- Health & support services
- Healthy child development
- Housing
- Personal health practices & coping skills
- Physical environments
- Social inclusion & exclusion
- Social support networks



### **Community development in Vancouver Coastal Health**

Community Developers (CDs) are a part of a complement of health programs and positions that utilize aspects of community development in their work to address the social determinants of health and to reduce health inequities.

At a local level, staff such as Community Nutritionists, Public Health Nurses and the Healthy Living Team engage in health promotion and employ a community



development approach in the delivery of services to encourage clients to take a more active role in their own health care and to improve health outcomes.

At a regional level, the Population Health Team develops policies to improve the health of the whole population and to reduce health inequities among population groups. The Community Engagement Team facilitates public involvement to enhance community participation in health service planning and decision-making. And, the SMART Fund provides grants to non-profit organizations to support health promotion programs and community capacity building with vulnerable populations.

CDs are specialists who collaborate with staff, residents, organizations and government agencies to develop and advocate for services, policies and projects that promote health, strengthen communities and create a more accessible and responsive public health system. CDs are located throughout the region but primarily work at a local level. While some CDs work for a specific program or for a particular population group, the majority of CDs have a geographic focus – meaning that they work with a variety of population groups and health issues within a particular geographic area. To meet the unique needs and contexts found throughout the VCH region, the work of CDs can differ quite significantly from one area to another. This profile explains the work of the six geographically-focused CDs working in community health in Vancouver.

***Community Developers (CDs) are a part of a complement of health programs and positions that employ aspects of community development in their work .***

By associating health with health care, we have largely ignored the important role communities play in creating conditions that support and sustain health.

We need to find ways to turn the treatment system into a health system by emphasizing health promotion and by strengthening communities to identify issues, set priorities, make decisions and take action around health issues.

[Hoffman and Dupont, 1992](#)



### Community Developers in Vancouver Community Health Services

Many VCH services in Vancouver are provided by Vancouver Community Health Services (VC). The city is divided into six Community Health Areas to facilitate the delivery of services and to enhance responsiveness to local needs. In VC, there are six geographically-based CDs who primarily serve the Community Health Area in which they are located, but also work on city-wide initiatives.

*CDs tackle a variety of issues related to the social determinants of health, including everything from food security to transportation to early childhood development.*



CDs collaborate with community organizations, residents, government agencies and health staff across program areas to tackle a variety of issues related to the social determinants of health. These might include everything from food security to transportation to early childhood development.

CDs have a Masters-level education with expertise in community and social development theories and practice. Some of their skills and strengths include: facilitating group processes and partnership development; a comprehensive understanding of the non-profit sector; in-depth knowledge of community resources; experience in nurturing ideas and project planning; and extensive connections both inside and outside of the health system.

CDs report to Directors and are situated between the frontline and management levels, often serving as a link between the two. They are not attached to any one



department, which allows them to work with a variety of service areas and to facilitate the cross-pollination and integration of ideas, strategies and programs.

Their skills-base and scope of practice are broad, allowing them to take on different roles to support both the community and VCH and to tailor their involvement to the needs of an initiative.

Perhaps one of the most unique aspects of CDs is the role they play as a catalyst. They bring creativity and energy to the table, which often inspires and motivates others to take action. They highlight common ground and options for ways forward, bringing groups with diverse interests together to achieve a common purpose.

Together with their partners, CDs develop and advocate for services, policies and projects that promote health, strengthen communities and create a more accessible and responsive public health system.

***CDs highlight common ground and options for ways forward, bringing groups with diverse interests together to achieve a common purpose.***



# Five strategies for Community Developers

To help define their practice, CDs have identified five strategies that frame the breadth of their work. The strategies have been informed by the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO), as well as by other health promotion and community development frameworks utilized in Vancouver Coastal Health and by other health authorities across Canada.

The five strategies are:

1. **Strengthening Community Capacity**
2. **Improving Access to Health Services and Information**
3. **Enhancing Public Health Systems**
4. **Building Partnerships**
5. **Creating Supportive Environments**

The strategies are intended to provide an understanding of common goals and themes in CD work. Because of the complex nature of community development, CDs typically do not exclusively employ one strategy over another. Most often a CD will engage one particular strategy for an initiative, but over time may draw on other strategies as contexts change, issues emerge and ideas evolve.

In the following pages, the strategies will be outlined in more detail. Each one is paired with a case example to illustrate how a CD utilized the strategy within a real-life project. In addition to illustrating the main strategy, each case example also has a list of “Other Strategies At Work Here,” which identifies other strategies that were used over the course of the project.

*Most often a CD will engage one particular strategy for an initiative, but over time may draw on other strategies as contexts change, issues emerge and ideas evolve.*

# The strategies at a glance

STRATEGY	WHAT	WHY	HOW
<b>Strengthening community capacity</b> 	Supporting residents and community organizations to respond to local health needs.	It builds skills and resources in the community for health promotion, complementing VCH services, multiplying health gains and addressing the underlying determinants of health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing and enhancing community resources</li> <li>• Strengthening local leadership</li> <li>• Fostering social capital of health</li> </ul>
<b>Improving access to health services and information</b>	Enabling individuals and service providers to access resources that help people get well and stay healthy. 	It encourages effective and efficient use of health resources, facilitating timely access to information and the development and delivery of accessible and appropriate services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping the flow of information</li> <li>• Addressing barriers</li> <li>• Developing and enhancing health services</li> </ul>
<b>Enhancing public health systems</b> 	Integrating community development within the health system to strengthen its capacity to promote health and wellness.	It supports VCH to create upstream programs and policies, reducing the demand on acute care and improving the overall health of the population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a CD lens for organizational change</li> <li>• Acting as a resource to staff and students</li> <li>• Incorporating community into decision making</li> </ul>
<b>Building partnerships</b> 	Creating connections that encourage and enable people and organizations to work together to address health needs.	It supports stakeholders across sectors to combine their energy and resources to address complex health and social issues, widening and deepening the positive impact of their efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building and sustaining relationships</li> <li>• Connecting stakeholders</li> <li>• Facilitating formal collaborations</li> </ul>
<b>Creating supportive environments</b> 	Fostering physical and social contexts that promote healthy lives.	It stimulates macro level change in societal systems and community structures so that they promote health in neighbourhoods and in people's day-to-day lives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocating for healthy public policy</li> <li>• Strengthening community infrastructure</li> <li>• Supporting VCH initiatives that build healthy environments</li> </ul>

# Strengthening community capacity

*Supporting residents and community organizations to respond to local health needs*

## Why

It builds skills and resources in the community for health promotion, complementing VCH services, multiplying health gains and addressing the underlying determinants of health.

## How

### Developing and enhancing community resources

CDs collaborate on projects that help to create or improve services, small-scale infrastructure and other community resources at the grassroots. Bringing a health perspective to local issues, CDs identify existing community assets that can be combined or utilized in creative ways to achieve different or better outcomes. CD involvement may include assisting with project design, resource procurement or evaluation for assets such as a shuttle bus for seniors, a community garden, or programming at a youth centre.

### Strengthening local leadership

CDs help to develop the rich base of human capital found in communities. This involves recognizing emerging champions and providing opportunities for them to increase their leadership skills. CDs also help with organizational development in the non-profit sector, enhancing the ability of groups and agencies to identify and respond to community issues. Examples of CD involvement include facilitating a strategic visioning process, conducting a needs assessment workshop, and sharing advice, knowledge and tools so that residents and organizations can move their initiatives forward.

### Fostering social capital

CDs promote social organization or social capital, the interactions between people which leads to the establishment of networks, trust and social norms that increase a society's productive potential (Putnam, 2000). CDs support community members to come together to cooperate, form connections and build solidarity. Some ways CDs do this include: creating opportunities for civic engagement, helping to organize community events, and strengthening informal and formal social networks.

STRATEGY



## Impact

“Your passion and care for our community is an inspiration to our residents’ coalition. With your leadership we are motivated to move beyond merely discussing the issues of the day to actually taking meaningful action to help make our neighbourhood a healthier and safer place for everyone.”

**Damian Murphy**  
Resident

# STRATEGY 1 IN ACTION

## STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

### Mobilizing South Asians for change

A CD heard escalating concerns from the public and health staff about the high rate of diabetes among South Asians living in Vancouver. The CD was also aware that the latest research confirmed that the incidence of diabetes among South Asians was much higher than that of the general population and supported the observations on the ground.

The CD brought together community members and service providers to discuss the issues and set priorities. The group determined that there was a pressing need to raise awareness and educate the public and other service providers on how to prevent and manage diabetes. A principal goal was to nurture leadership so that community members would become the foundation of diabetes prevention efforts. The CD assisted the group to procure funding and to develop a plan of action. As well as helping out with its coordination and evaluation, the CD also ensured that the project was guided by a Steering Committee made up of members of the South Asian community. This was a vital component of the project and kept the focus on culturally relevant messages, as well as on accessible and appropriate activities.

The project included several well-attended events such as an Awareness and Screening Day, a theatrical production, cooking demonstrations and walking clubs. The activities had a significant impact on improving people's knowledge of diabetes, but equally important was how the activities helped to provide local leadership opportunities. A key aspect of the cooking demonstrations and walking clubs was that both involved the extensive training of volunteers from the South Asian community to lead those activities. This not only resulted in more effective programming, but also in a contingent of community leaders who subsequently utilized their new skills and knowledge for health promotion efforts outside of the project. For example, two of the walking club leaders helped the YMCA to adapt its nutrition education program for South Asians. Another leader applied for a small grant to promote physical activity to South Asian women. Her community event was a huge success and attracted over 100 people.

The project also strengthened the capacity of community agencies to deliver services. Prior to the project there were few coordinated or collaborative efforts underway to address diabetes amongst South Asians. The project provided a mechanism for that to happen, improved understanding of the disease and developed culturally appropriate educational resources that community agencies could then use in their own programs, further broadening the impact of the project.



#### OTHER STRATEGIES AT WORK HERE

- **Building Partnerships**
- **Improving Access to Health Services and Information**

# Improving access to health services and information

*Enabling individuals and service providers to access resources that help people get well and stay healthy*

## Why

It encourages effective and efficient use of health resources, facilitating timely access to information and the development and delivery of accessible and appropriate services.

## How

### Helping the flow of information

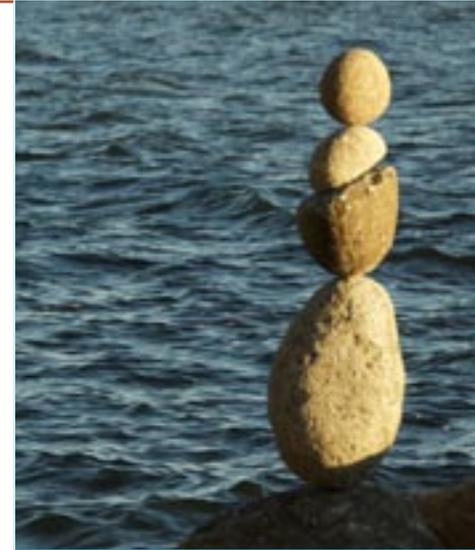
CDs use a variety of methods to disseminate information through their networks to keep health staff and the community sector up to date on a wide spectrum of health and social topics. This helps to promote services, facilitate referrals, and share funding sources, new program materials, workshops and research. CDs also aim to strengthen communication by encouraging a two-way flow of information between and within VCH and the community.

### Addressing barriers

Using a health inequities lens, CDs identify barriers to health care and highlight services that are not reaching vulnerable population groups. Working with these groups and service providers, CDs help to develop policies, strategies and practical solutions to remove the barriers. Examples of this could include making a building more physically accessible or redesigning a service to be more culturally appropriate.

### Developing and enhancing health services

CDs improve existing services and create new programs to increase effectiveness, address gaps and extend the reach of health services beyond their usual scope. CDs help with program planning and evaluation, strengthen the link between VCH and community sector services, advise on how to use existing resources in new ways, and provide information on innovative approaches to reach targeted population groups.



## Impact

“Thanks for the amazing amount of information you shared about services for seniors in the area. You certainly have given me a lot to use and great ideas for future work beyond the scope of this project.”

Leah Pomerantz  
Project Coordinator,  
Profile of Seniors Learners  
in Public Housing

# STRATEGY 2 IN ACTION

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES AND INFORMATION

### Opening doors for the homeless

In an informal meeting with the Manager of an emergency shelter, a CD learned that the shelter staff were having difficulty accessing services for their clients from the nearby community health centre (CHC). Because of this, the staff were sending their clients a significant distance outside of the local area to a different CHC where it was easier to access services for this at-risk population group. As well as being a clear barrier to health services for clients, this practice was also creating a number of cascading concerns. It generated unnecessary logistical work for the shelter staff. It was putting a strain on the other health centre. And, it involved tapping into another VCH-funded service, Safe Ride, to transport the shelter clients to the more distant CHC.

The CD raised the issues with the Managers at the local CHC. The CD then led a series of meetings to facilitate the links and lines of communication between the shelter and CHC staff. At the table were frontline staff and management from the shelter and from four CHC program areas. The discussion focused on identifying the barriers that the shelter staff and clients were encountering. There was also attention given to the challenges that the CHC staff were encountering in their efforts to connect with the shelter and, in some cases, with each other. Through these discussions, many ideas were generated and implemented to simplify referrals and other related processes and to lower or remove the barriers. This has led to many improvements in service delivery, including the creation of primary care drop-in times at the CHC for shelter clients and other vulnerable groups. Equally important is the strengthened relationship between the shelter and the CHC, which has led to other discussions on how to increase service provision and access for the homeless population.



#### **OTHER STRATEGIES AT WORK HERE**

- **Building Partnerships**

# Enhancing public health systems

*Integrating community development within the health system to strengthen its capacity to promote health and wellness*

## Why

It supports VCH to create upstream programs and policies, reducing the demand on acute care and improving the overall health of the population.

## How

### Providing a CD lens for organizational change

CDs support VCH to make system improvements to enhance its capacity to focus on health promotion and to address the social determinants of health. CDs bring both an equity lens and a broad definition of health to internal policy tables and facilitate cooperation and integration within VCH. CDs infuse these in-house processes with skills and knowledge that go beyond traditional approaches, helping to identify where opportunities exist to strengthen VCH's role in healthy communities, as well as complement the work of other sectors.

### Acting as a resource to staff and students

CDs share their expertise with staff and students to support them to utilize a community development approach, develop projects and build skills for working with communities. CDs act as a sounding board for ideas, suggest methods and resources, and provide help throughout the various stages of project development. CDs also conduct workshops and do presentations to enhance staff and students' ability to engage in health promotion work.

### Incorporating community into decision making

CDs emphasize that the community needs to inform health planning to ensure that the health system develops in step with the communities it serves. CDs maintain knowledge of local issues and neighbourhood dynamics and share this information with staff and management to advocate for community needs. CDs also support public involvement in various processes and provide advice to staff on how to engage with target populations in project development and evaluation.



## Impact

“Your outstanding analytical skills and exceptional ‘outside the box’ way of thinking have been essential for us to better understand and integrate the principles of community engagement into our planning.

Your recommendations were useful and gave us a new perspective on strategies to achieve our goals.”

**Ellie Faroughi**  
Project Lead, Cross-Cultural  
Mental Health Program,  
Vancouver Coastal Health

# STRATEGY 3 IN ACTION

## ENHANCING PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS

### Guiding systems change: The use of honoraria

In 2005, a CD noticed that the application of honoraria was inconsistent across programs in Vancouver Community Health Services. Honoraria are cash payments given in recognition of an act or service by people who are volunteering their time. The inconsistent application was resulting in an ineffective use of resources in some cases, and lost opportunities in other cases.

The CD researched the use of honoraria in a variety of contexts in Canada and around the world. The CD also consulted with many different stakeholders in and outside of VCH to determine how and why honoraria were being used in any given program or situation. A key finding was that, when used appropriately, the use of honoraria could be an innovative way to engage at-risk groups in service delivery through peer programming. The use of honoraria in this way not only increases the reach of health services to vulnerable populations, but also provides the peers themselves with multiple health benefits.

Based on the research and consultations done over a year and a half, the CD developed Guidelines for the Use of Honoraria in Vancouver Community, which highlighted best practices and recommendations for utilizing honoraria in community health services in Vancouver.

In early 2008, senior management approved the guidelines for use in Vancouver Community Health Services. The CD then disseminated the document to health staff and facilitated workshops to help them understand how to put the guidelines into practice. Working with Managers and other stakeholders, the CD will monitor and evaluate the use of the guidelines over the next two years.

The guidelines are now being shared more widely outside of VCH, particularly with non-profit agencies working with peer groups, in an effort to promote consistent language and practice in using honoraria at the community level.



#### **OTHER STRATEGIES AT WORK HERE**

- **Strengthening Community Capacity**
- **Improving Access to Health Services Information**

# Building partnerships

*Creating connections that encourage and enable people and organizations to work together to address health needs*

## Why

It supports stakeholders across sectors to combine their energy and resources to address the complexity of health and social issues, widening and deepening the positive impact of their efforts.

## How

### Building and sustaining relationships

Relationships are the foundation of community development. They improve the sharing of ideas and resources and help CDs to keep current on hot button issues and emerging needs. Moreover, they reinforce the alliances required to address the complex interactions of the social determinants of health. CDs invest considerable time in nurturing and maintaining relationships across a wide range of VCH program areas and in sectors outside of health.

### Connecting stakeholders

CDs create and strengthen connections between and within VCH and the community sector. CD involvement includes helping to develop networks and coalitions, organize forums and facilitate discussions. CDs strive to broaden the dialogue to go beyond narrow mandates. They are also instrumental in recognizing those moments when priorities across sectors are aligned, highlighting the commonalities and sparking action.

### Facilitating formal collaborations

CDs help to develop formal partnerships and to ensure that all stakeholders have what they need to effectively work together. CDs identify strategic partners, highlight options for ways forward, and negotiate partnership agreements. CDs also facilitate visioning and goal-setting sessions and develop mechanisms and protocols to strengthen and maintain the bonds between partners to increase the sustainability of their joint ventures.



## Impact

“Thanks to you we have been meeting with lots of people we would have never connected with otherwise!”

We are partnering with North Community Health Office and with the South Vancouver Youth Centre. Everyone has been very eager to share ideas and resources.”

**Amanda Liddell**  
Public Health Nurse,  
Vancouver Coastal Health

# STRATEGY 4 IN ACTION

## BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

### Working together for harm reduction

In 2003, residents, business leaders and community agencies expressed concern about the growing problem of crystal methamphetamine (meth) misuse among gay men in Vancouver. In response to this, a CD brought together stakeholders to discuss the issue and possibilities for a collaborative approach to the situation. The CD then facilitated a strategic planning session to help the group develop goals and actions.

With a plan in place, the CD continued to support the group's formation and follow up on action items. Because the group remained connected and was moving forward with its plan, more people became interested in being a part of the initiative. Within a year, the Gay Men's Crystal Meth Working Group (GaMMA) had expanded to include a wide variety of community groups, residents, researchers and health services staff.

The CD also helped to develop a grant application between five agencies, successfully procuring \$112,000 from Health Canada's Drug Strategy Program. The partners used the funds to conduct a needs assessment with users and ex-users and to train peer volunteers to do harm reduction outreach in the gay community.

The CD recognized an opportunity to link the work of GaMMA to another city-wide coalition working on the issue of meth addiction, the Methamphetamine Action Response Committee (MARC). MARC had a higher profile and focused on street involved youth. Through this strategic link, meth misuse by gay men made it onto the radar of a whole new set of stakeholders, expanding the scope of MARC and the reach of the issue to a wider audience.

When the BC government announced \$11 million for a meth strategy that included funding for treatment options, GaMMA advocated for the development of services specific to gay men. In 2006, backed by the provincial dollars, VCH created meth specific treatment services for both street youth and gay men. The harm reduction volunteers who had been trained through the GaMMA project subsequently partnered with VCH to provide peer support groups as an adjunct to the new treatment program.



#### OTHER STRATEGIES AT WORK HERE

- **Strengthening Community Capacity**
- **Improving Access to Health Services Information**

# Creating supportive environments

*Fostering physical and social contexts that promote healthy lives*

# 5 STRATEGY

## Why

It stimulates macro level change in societal systems and community structures so that they promote health in neighbourhoods and in people's day-to-day lives.

## How

### Advocating for healthy public policy

CDs encourage agencies outside of traditional health care to utilize a healthy communities lens in their decision making processes. Engaging with entities such as the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver School Board, CDs provide information, advice and a broad perspective on health to inform policy directions. CDs highlight the role different public bodies play when it comes to the social determinants of health and strive to enhance public sector policies so that they improve community health.

### Strengthening community infrastructure

CDs participate in projects that aim to develop health-promoting structures at neighbourhood and municipal levels. Often the sole VCH representative at the table, CDs are involved in a range of urban and social planning initiatives such as the creation of a community literacy plan, development of a strategy for alternative forms of transportation and research on the effects of neighbourhood environments on social capital. CDs contribute community development expertise, provide a health lens, and make the link between community infrastructure, people's daily activities and health outcomes.

### Supporting VCH initiatives that build healthy environments

As well as representing VCH in external initiatives, CDs are also involved in VCH projects that strive to develop supportive environments, such as the Community Food Action Initiative. In some cases CDs take the lead, in others CDs assume more of a participatory role. Whichever the case, CDs are poised with the skills, expertise and knowledge to help VCH prepare for increasing provincial expectations to move public health beyond its traditional realm and expand its role in creating healthy environments.



## Impact

“Thanks for your insight on the health authority. It has been valuable for putting the various pieces together to see how things are related: health, schools, road safety, environmental groups and municipalities. You've been a huge help!”

Bonnie Fenton  
Consultant, Translink  
Cycling Education &  
Promotion Project

# STRATEGY 5 IN ACTION

## CREATING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

### Planting the seed for food security

Community food security exists when all citizens obtain a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes healthy choices, community self-reliance and equal access for everyone. In 2006, as part of the Healthy Eating component of ActNow BC, provincial dollars were given to each health authority for community-based food security activities, known as the Community Food Action Initiative (CFAI).

Acknowledging the link between food security, chronic disease prevention and healthy communities, a CD stepped forward to take the lead on developing CFAI in Vancouver. The CD brought together an advisory committee of key stakeholders who identified two main priorities for investment of seed funds available through CFAI: expanding the number of community gardens and developing food security networks.

Community gardens improve access to affordable, locally grown organic produce. They also encourage physical activity and create a public space where community members can connect. Currently, the supply of community gardens does not meet the demand and people are often on waiting lists for years. Given this situation, CFAI funded the development of six gardens and the CD has participated in discussions with the City of Vancouver to recommend changes to municipal policies on land allocation for urban agriculture.

Food security networks are neighbourhood systems that facilitate connection and collaboration between residents to address food issues. CFAI provided funding to establish networks in three neighbourhoods in Vancouver. To date, the networks have supported over 500 members of the community to form food buying clubs, learn about food preservation and utilize environmentally sustainable food growing practices. The networks also identify food security issues and work with public partners such as the City, VCH and the Vancouver School Board to develop plans to address the needs.

In addition to coordinating CFAI funding, the CD looks for opportunities to improve the sustainability of CFAI-funded projects and to maximize the funds through matching dollars and partnerships. The CD has also become a key resource person for food security issues both inside and outside of VCH. In this role, the CD promotes collaboration across sectors and provides input on provincial policy papers, with the long term goal of bringing about structural changes to the health, food, social and economic systems in order to improve access to food.



#### **OTHER STRATEGIES AT WORK HERE**

- **Building Partnerships**
- **Strengthening Community Capacity**
- **Enhancing Public Health Systems**



# Summary

CDs in Vancouver Community Health Services are focused on addressing the social determinants of health with the goal of reducing health inequities and improving the overall health of people in Vancouver.

Providing expertise in community development, CDs collaborate with health staff, residents, community organizations and government agencies to develop and advocate for services, policies and projects that promote health, strengthen communities and create a more accessible and responsive public health system.

Community development in health can take place at the grassroots, in neighbourhoods or communities, and also at an organizational level in policy, planning and service delivery. CDs work on a wide variety of health and health-related issues with multiple stakeholders both inside and outside of Vancouver Coastal Health. The role that a CD plays is determined by the needs of the initiative at hand and the context in which it is situated.

There is one CD located in each Community Health Area (CHA) in Vancouver. To contact a CD, phone the Community Health Centre in your CHA.

## Contact information

CHA1	Three Bridges Community Health Centre	604-736-9844
CHA2	North Community Health Office	604-253-3575
CHA3	Evergreen Community Health Centre	604-872-2511
CHA4	Pacific Spirit Community Health Centre	604-261-6366
CHA5	Raven Song Community Health Centre	604-709-6400
CHA6	South Community Health Centre	604-321-6151

*CDs work on a wide variety of health and health-related issues with multiple stakeholders both inside and outside of Vancouver Coastal Health.*



## References

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