

Basic Principles of
Healthy Cities:

Health Promotion



Department of Health

Consult a doctor when being ill

To many, health is “a state of physical well-being and the absence of disease” while health is achieved through advanced medical technologies in the prevention and treatment of diseases by means of vaccinations, diagnosis and medication, etc. provided by health care professionals. As time advances and with the ever-increasing medical costs, people gradually realise that changing their lifestyles is more effective in improving their health and preventing diseases while the cost involved is minimal. It marks the beginning of health education.

Health Education

Health education is a teaching process through which information is disseminated so that people can acquire knowledge on health. They will then change their attitude, behave in a manner and adopt a lifestyle conducive to health, so as to enhance their quality of living to achieve physical and mental well-being.

The audience of health education can be anybody, no matter the healthy or disease-stricken. Anyone in possession of accurate health knowledge and a proactive attitude can also educate, influence and help others.

Yet, it is hard to put into practice what is known and it is often difficult to change people's behaviour merely by means of health education. For instance, we all understand well that smoking is detrimental to health but some people still choose to keep the habit. The fact reveals that health education alone may not be effective enough in obtaining the desired outcome.



Health Promotion

When compared with health education, health promotion takes a step further. Health promotion certainly includes health education on individuals, but the more important part lies in enabling them to better control and change those external determinants of health such as social, political, environmental and economic factors. A multi-pronged approach is adopted in health promotion, such as changing public policies, creating a healthy living environment, promoting healthy lifestyles and carrying out capacity building for individuals, etc. Therefore, active participation by all sectors of society and professional groups is of utmost importance as the work done solely by the healthcare sector is very limited.

How can concepts of health promotion be put into practice?

Concepts of health promotion can be put into practice through the following five categories of actions:

1. Build Healthy Public Policy

Public policies conducive to health include legislation, financial arrangement of the government and taxation, etc. Public policy makers should be aware of the health consequences of the policies and to accept their responsibilities for people's health.



Example: Efforts on tobacco control

The government, through legislation, prohibits display of tobacco advertisements in any form so as to minimise the chance of people being lured to smoke by such advertisements. In addition, smoking has been prohibited in indoor areas of all restaurant premises and indoor workplaces, etc. since 2007 in a bid to create a smoke-free environment and reduce the harm of secondhand smoke on members of the public.

2. Create Supportive Environments

People's health is strongly affected by environmental factors. Health promotion should therefore start from daily habits and the living environment. Creating a living environment which is safe, satisfying, enjoyable and interesting contributes to healthier and happier living.

Example: Promotion of healthy eating at school

Schools can formulate healthy eating policies to prohibit the selling, advertising and promotion of drinks and snacks not complying with the requirements of healthy eating guides. Tuck shops should also be encouraged to offer students with fruit and other healthy snacks at concessionary prices, so as to create a culture of healthy eating, making it easier for school children to choose healthy food.



3. Strengthen Community Actions

Communities should have concrete and effective involvement in the decision making and implementation of community affairs. Only through this approach can people better control their own health. Health promoters can draw on existing human and material resources in the community to support self-help of the community and the individuals for strengthening public participation in and direction of health matters. The underprivileged, therefore, should be treated equally.

Example: Catering for the needs of the disabled

The disabled can actively participate in studying the status of barrier free provisions and access in their community to arouse public concern over barrier free facilities. They can also make specific proposals on improvement works so that individuals with special needs can also make use of community facilities freely and equally.

4. Develop Personal Skills

Through the provision of information, health education and strengthening of daily living skills, individuals will be able to protect effectively their own health and the environment in which they are situated, so that they can make choices conducive to health.

Example: Promotion of balanced diet

The Department of Health, through its website, leaflets, radio broadcast and TV advertisements, etc., advocates a balanced diet proactively to encourage members of the public to eat at least two servings of fruits and three servings of vegetables every day and offer advice on how such key points can be incorporated into our daily life.



5. Reorient Health Services

The responsibility for health promotion should be shared among individuals, community groups, health service institutions and government departments. Health services should no longer be confined to clinical treatment of diseases but extended to disease prevention and health promotion. Health-related researches must be strengthened while changes in professional education and training are necessary to refocus on the total needs of the individual as a whole person.



Example: Health care professionals' involvement in promoting exercises

Joint collaboration has been initiated by the Department of Health with the Hong Kong Medical Association, organisations promoting exercises and other non-governmental organisations to equip primary health care professionals with knowledge and techniques of exercise prescription through training. Patients are also offered advice on exercises to improve treatment outcome through exercising.

Everyone has a part to play in achieving better health

Enjoying good health is the basic right of every individual. A society can flourish only if its people are healthy enough, while medical costs can be reduced at the same time. The government, professionals from various sectors, non-governmental organisations and the general public all have an indispensable role to play in putting health promotion work into practice. All parties should take part in the process proactively, contributing concerted efforts to build a healthy city.

Copies of this leaflet are available from the Community Liaison Division.

Please direct request to ha2_cld2@dh.gov.hk

This leaflet is also accessible at the Central Health Education Unit's Website www.cheu.gov.hk and Centre for Health Protection's website www.chp.gov.hk

This leaflet was last updated in April 2009. For more information, please contact the Community Liaison Division of the Health Promotion Branch of the Department of Health by email at: cld@dh.gov.hk.