



Building a healthy future

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In our daily lives we usually focus on the little things: getting to work on time; having lunch ready for the

kids; arranging a dentist appointment or what have you. These are things you simply have to do, but every once in a while, it pays to look beyond the ‘trees’ to the ‘forest.’ This is just as true for organizations as it is for individuals.

The BC Healthy Living Alliance (BCHLA) in an organization that has worked on ‘the forest’ since 2003, and with much success.

Formed as a partnership between a multitude of organizations all working to improve the health of British Columbians, its members include, among many: ActNowBC, BC Lung Association, Canadian Cancer Society, Dietitians of Canada, Public Health Association of BC, BC Recreation and Parks Association and others. A varied group indeed, but with common goals.

In 2005 the provincial government provided a one-time grant of \$25.2M to the BCHLA to expand its network of members and activities to improve the health of British Columbians through healthy living initiatives and activities. It worked!

The BCHLA works towards preventing chronic disease by focussing on three major risk factors that underlie much of the chronic disease in BC: tobacco use, unhealthy eating and physical inactivity. Their goal is to address these common risk factors.

With the new funding, the BCHLA supported some 900 initiatives, workshops and programs with 298 grants distributed across the province. They brought meaningful projects to life; many leveraged

the seed funding with additional resources to further improve projects.

Four categories of activity or project were created with the new funding. Healthy eating and increasing physical activity were two of the keys. Tobacco reduction was an important element in many plans. And to bring it all together, capacity-building in communities so that future efforts could be initiated internally by people with this new knowledge and experience.

One very successful program established ‘farm to school’ salad bars. How successful? To date there are 26 locations doing this, from Chetwynd to Masset, Vernon to Tahsis, and in multiple First Nations communities. The program links local farmers to schools to provide fresh vegetables and fruit every week or more. This gives children more awareness about healthy eating, local food, gardening, agriculture and seasonality.

Another successful initiative was in partnership with post-secondary institutions to help with tobacco cessation. Funding helped to help to establish tobacco cessation programs and worked with schools to develop and implement tobacco-free campus policies.

The support of the BCHLA was not simply financial. It also came in the form of tools, resources and personnel to help communities. Long term, the most beneficial of the BCHLA efforts will be capacity building — helping people and communities to help themselves by increasing their knowledge and skills... their capacities. Learn more by visiting the [BCHLA website](#).

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