



FOR RELEASE

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## **Minister announces plan to improve health and wellness**

WHITEHORSE—Yukon's Minister of Health and Social Services Doug Graham today announced an initiative to improve the health and well-being of Yukoners.

"The *Pathways to Wellness* project will allow us to focus on the promotion of well-being and the prevention of illness, to help get ahead of the rising tide of chronic conditions and the impact on the health care system," Graham said.

The minister said the first step is to forge a common understanding of the factors that influence health and what works when it comes to improving the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities.

As part of today's announcement, the department launched a website, [www.yukonwellness.ca](http://www.yukonwellness.ca), and released a background paper entitled *Pathways to Wellness*, and a video entitled *Let's Talk about Health*, both of which can be viewed on the website.

People are asked to go to the website for up-to-date practical information on how to improve health and well-being, sign-up for "e-tips" on wellness, and start conversations about wellness with their friends, family, coworkers and others. The project will use the power of social networks to spread the word by inviting Yukoners to send one email to five friends, encouraging them to visit the wellness website. Individuals who forward the email to five friends will be entered into a draw to win \$100.

The second part of *Pathways to Wellness* focuses specifically on children and families.

"We know that investments in children, young people and their families will give us the best results in the long term," Graham said. "Wellness is bigger than individuals taking steps to improve their own health. It's also about the options available, the choices we make, and the power of communities to take action."

Over the next year, the *Pathways to Wellness* project team will meet with interested individuals, groups and communities to share information, build on existing strengths and priorities, and help spark action at the local level to improve the health and well-being of children and youth. This work will culminate in a wellness plan for Yukon's children and families by March 2014.

"We want to build a future where all Yukon people have the possibility of living long and living well," Graham said. "To do this we need to ensure that those who face the greatest challenges—First Nations, low-income families and rural residents—are fully involved in shaping a wellness plan that works for them."

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See backgrounder below:

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## ***Pathways to Wellness* project**

### **What is wellness?**

- Wellness is a broad concept. It includes eating well, being active, living smoke-free and avoiding harmful use of alcohol, but it goes beyond these examples of physical well-being.
- A holistic approach to wellness also includes self-awareness and positive identity (emotional well-being), the quality of the relationships we have (social well-being), enthusiasm for life-long learning (intellectual well-being), how we occupy our time (occupational well-being) and finding meaning by being part of something larger than ourselves (spiritual well-being).
- Each dimension is important in its own right because it builds on and reinforces the others.

### **Why now?**

- Chronic conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes are on the rise and are being diagnosed at younger and younger ages.
- Approximately 25 per cent of Canadian children are overweight or obese, and chronic diseases are expected to increase by 58 per cent in the next 25 years.
- If these trends continue, for the first time in history, children today may not live as long or as well as their parents.
- Treating and managing chronic conditions account for about 60 per cent of Canada's health-care expenses.
- The World Health Organization estimates that 80 per cent of the leading chronic diseases are preventable.

### **Why focus on children and families?**

- Research has shown that getting a good start in life and continuing this support through adolescence and early adulthood has life-long benefits in terms of health, workforce participation and the quality of community life.  
What will the government do?
- Provide information and raise awareness about how to improve wellness at the individual, family and community level (e.g. through a website, background papers and presentations)
- Lead discussions about priorities, strengths and ways to improve wellness with Yukon groups, communities, business sector, faith communities, non-government organizations, and governments.
- Synthesize the evidence and Yukon knowledge, experience, values and ideas into a Wellness Plan for Yukon's Children and Families (March 2014).

### **How can people learn more now?**

- Read *Pathways to Wellness*, a background paper that summarizes what we know about wellness and the health of Yukon people, the factors that influence health from biology and genetics to public policy, and what kinds of actions will take us closer to a healthier future for all Yukoners.
- Visit [www.yukonwellness.ca](http://www.yukonwellness.ca) for specific information on wellness topics.