

Health Inequities : What Can We Do?

John Millar

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Health inequities

Heath Inequity – *The term Inequity has a moral and ethical dimension. It refers to the differences in health that are not only unnecessary and avoidable, but in addition unfair and unjust. (Whitehead 1992)*

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Why are health inequities a problem?

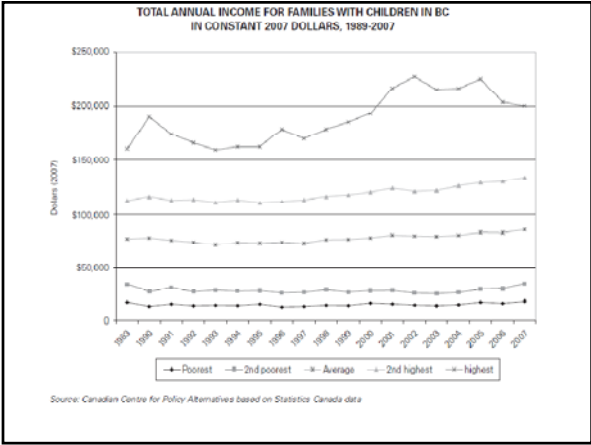
- Social justice, human dignity, equal opportunity, capacity
- Cause unnecessary disease and death leading to:
 - The health status of BC/Canada falling behind
 - Health care becoming unsustainable
 - Economic productivity lowered
 - Economy less competitive, growth slowed

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'Health inequities are caused by the inequitable distribution of money resources and power'.

- Sir Michael Marmot – WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health
- ...and income inequities are growing

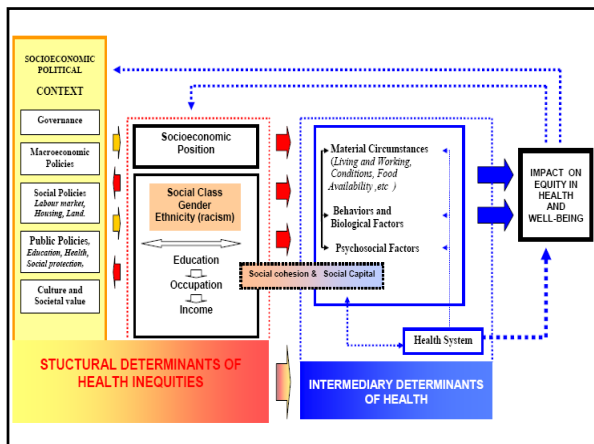
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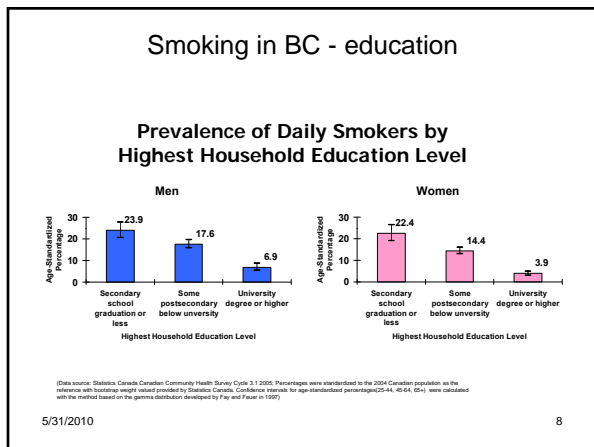


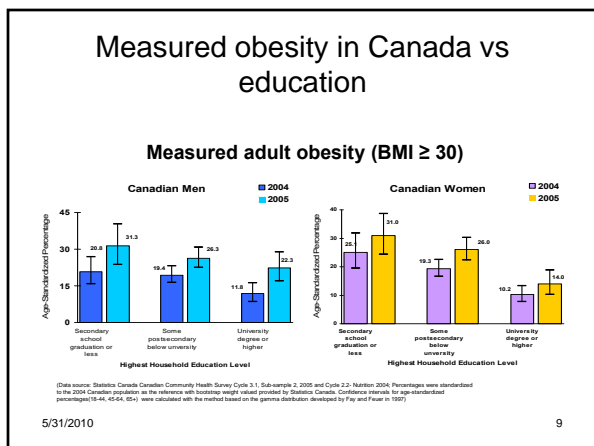
Causal pathway to chronic disease

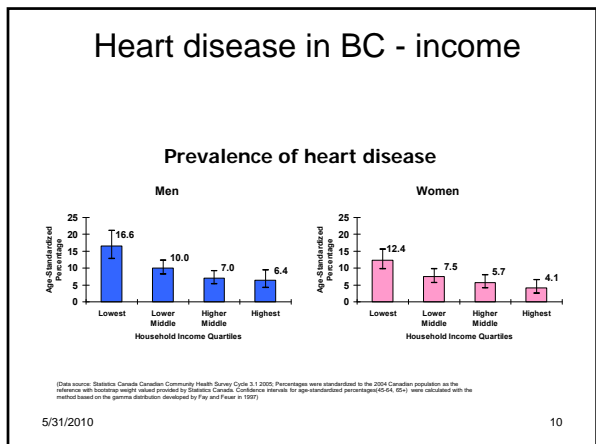
- Material – food, shelter, clothing, exercise, transportation
- Behavioural – diet, activity, smoking, alcohol/drugs, sexuality
- Psychosocial – social exclusion, neglect, abuse, violence, discrimination - stress
- A 2-way street, but predominantly from SE disadvantage to poor health

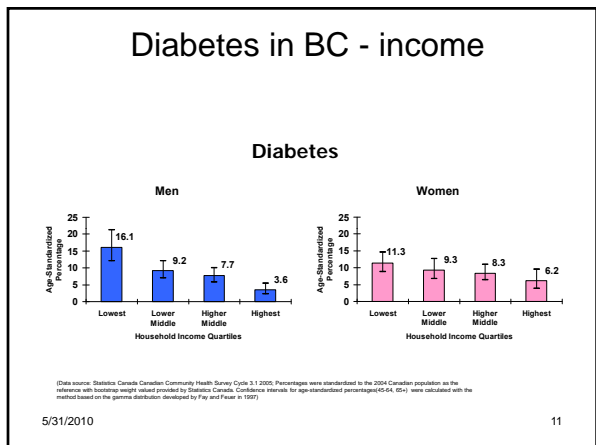
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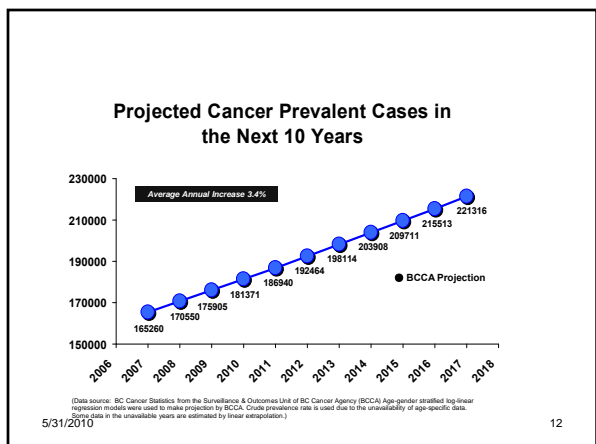




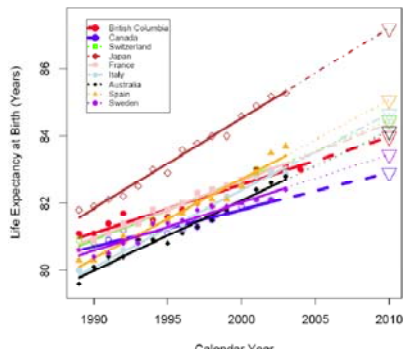






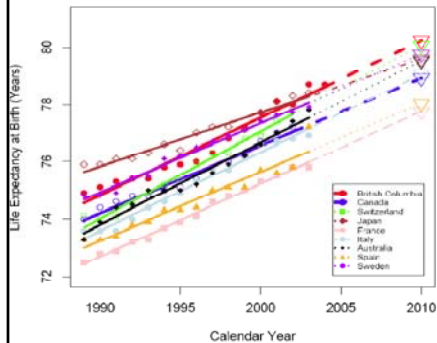


LEO (actual and projected) for women from BC, Canada and the healthiest nations of the world



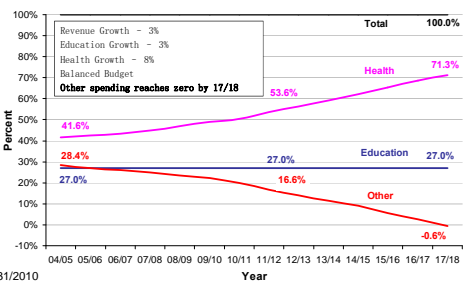
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LEO (actual and projected) for men from BC, Canada and the healthiest nations of the world



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Revenue/Spending Scenario



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Senator W. Keon (Co-Chair, Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science & Technology)

The real paradox...is that escalating health care spending constitutes a threat to a healthier population. If the truth be told, increased expenditures on health care are likely impacting negatively on the general health of our population by virtue of diminished investments in other areas like education (especially early childhood education), public housing, income security and other public services.

Hill Times, Jan 2008

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Social/political Change in a Complex Adaptive System

- Housing, the built environment & community
- Food & income security
- Early childhood development & care
- Education & literacy
- Employment & working conditions
- Health care system

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Intersectoral Processes

- Solving the inequitable distribution of resources and power can't be solved by government alone – will require an 'all-of-government and all-of-society' approach.
- Federal, provincial and community levels
- Needs to involve the private sector as well as 'civil society'

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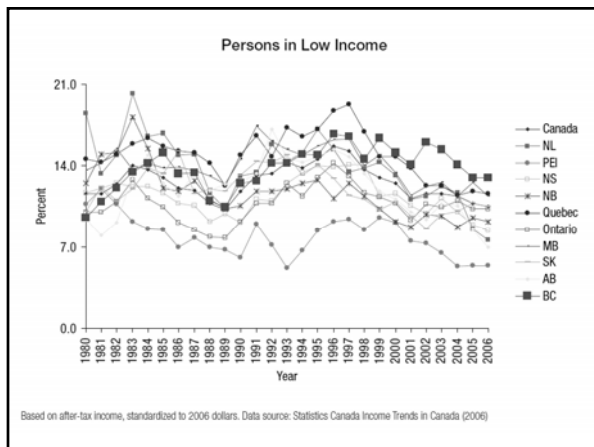
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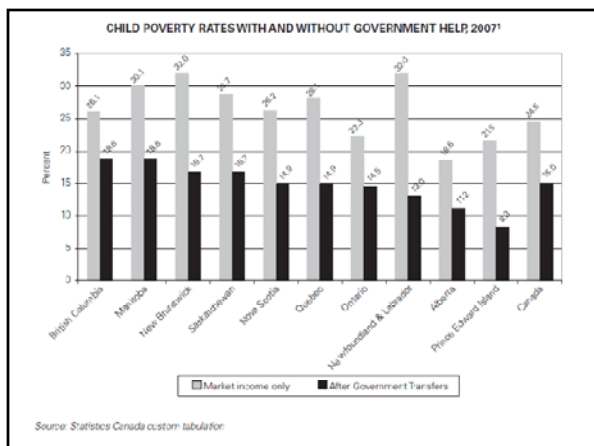
Canadian successes

- Nfld, Que, NB, NS, Ont, have introduced legislation and/or action plans to reduce poverty and improve the economy
- These plans include increasing paid employment and mitigating poverty
- Hamilton – a Prosperity Roundtable has been successful in engaging the private sector with local government & NGOs

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Common factors in poverty reduction strategies

- A comprehensive plan with goals & targets, agreed upon measures of poverty, substantial funding & an accountability mechanism
- Overall: ↑ paid employment, poverty mitigation
- Rely on cooperation across all levels of government and across all sectors
- Challenge – engaging the business sector- a prosperity agenda

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Increasing paid employment

- Economic growth
- Job creation
- Investments in job training, ECD, education (primary, secondary, post-secondary), adult education & literacy, language training
- Increases in minimum wage
- Earned income benefits – transition from welfare
- Income tax reductions for low income earners

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Poverty & unemployment mitigation

- Increasing & indexing income assistance
- Increasing child tax benefit with no claw back
- Increased EI benefits
- Universal access to ECD
- Investments in education at all levels
- Affordable housing availability
- Supports for youth, immigrants, disabled, visible minorities
- Social supports for isolated seniors
- Increased access to health care

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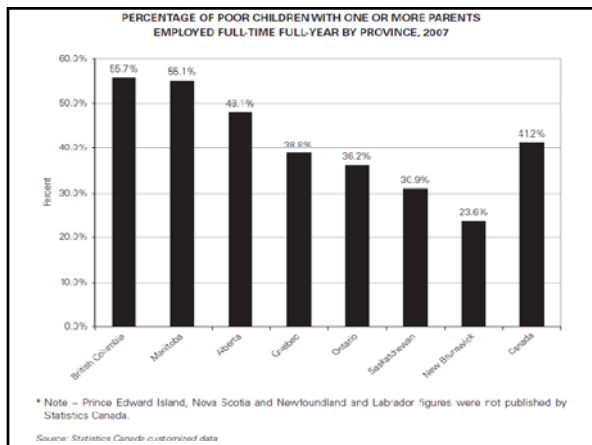
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Prosperity & Strengthening the Social Fabric

- A strategy to create a rising tide that lifts all boats – health & prosperity for all – reducing inequities in money, resources & power through smart economic growth
- Mobilize resources across all sectors – government, business, civil society
- And across all levels – national, provincial, local

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Overall strategy

Increase paid employment & mitigate poverty by:

- Increasing labour market attachment
- Job creation
- Improved productivity
- Strengthening the social fabric

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Increase labour market attachment

- Many people who are employed have low income jobs, often have more than one job & are in & out of employment
- Many people in low income jobs have been unable to meet their full potential because of inadequate care and development in early childhood, illiteracy, lack of language proficiency, incomplete education, no secondary ed, no trade, no computer, accounting, business skills & other challenges

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Increase labour market attachment:

- Investments by government, business and NGOs in low income workers:
 - Literacy, adult ed, language training
 - Increased high school completion, post-secondary
 - Training in trades, computer skills, accounting, business, entrepreneurship
 - Financial incentives – earned income benefits, tax relief
 - Paid education opportunities
- Higher incomes – living wage

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Result

- Those in the lower strata of the work force will be eligible to take higher paying jobs & in fact may be able to create those jobs

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Job creation

- Create 'good' jobs – compete in the knowledge economy
- Entrepreneurship
- Innovation
- Financing – micro-financing, venture capital, regulatory environment
- Support for R&D

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Improved productivity

- Human capital – increase education level across all of society:
 - Universal access to ECD
 - Investments in primary/secondary schools
 - Increase high school completion, trades training, business skills, post-secondary
 - Workplace wellness programs
- Physical capital –
 - Automation, robots, computers, connectivity
 - Machinery & equipment

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Strengthen the social fabric

- For those that can't work or are challenged:
 - Adequate income to support a family with dignity; food security, clothing, transport
 - Affordable housing, with supports such as mental health & addictions services
 - Family supports – universal access to ECD, access to child-friendly, age-friendly, safe environments

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How & who?

- Provincial government lead- cooperation with federal government & local government, NGOs & business
- Business sector engagement with local government- Hamilton Prosperity Table, Vancouver StreetstoHome, St John , Winnipeg, Vibrant Communities

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Health care role

- Individual clients
- Public health services – surveillance, reporting, community development, advocacy, networks
- Health care organisation – services to underserved
- Advocacy

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Prosperity without growth?

- Prosperity based on economic growth that is reliant on increased consumption of material resources and waste will not be either equitable or sustainable
- We must now begin to think about achieving international equity & sustainability
- The next ethical & moral dilemma!

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Thank you!

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