

Canadian Society for Circumpolar Health:
Strategic Outlook, 2004-2009

April 1, 2004

Introduction and Background

The Canadian Society for Circumpolar Health (CSCH) has undertaken a planning process to develop a “strategic outlook” document that will guide the organization for the next six years (2004 – 2009). Building on the momentum of the successful CSCH general assembly in Nuuk, Greenland in September 2003, the CSCH President canvassed the CSCH membership and received input on a renewed CSCH vision, mission, values, strategic directions and goals.

The CSCH, a non-government organization, was formally organized in 1984 in Anchorage, Alaska at the 6th International Symposium on Circumpolar Health, and subsequently became a charter member of the International Union for Circumpolar Health (IUCH) in 1986 in Stockholm Sweden. The CSCH goals are to improve and maintain the health of the circumpolar people in Canada, and to promote and support the efforts of all circumpolar peoples in attainment of better health. The Society participates in regular international circumpolar health congresses, and promotes circumpolar research and collaboration on circumpolar health issues. As of December 2003, there were 120 active CSCH members.

Planning Process

In December 2003 the President of CSCH sent a questionnaire to all members on behalf of the CSCH Regional Advisory Council (CSCH Council) seeking input on key issues and opportunities for the Society, areas where the Society could best make an impact and where it should focus its energy and resources. Members were also asked for feedback on draft vision, mission and value statements as well as potential strategic directions and implementation goals. This input informed the development of a draft document that was reviewed and discussed at the February 2004 Council meeting and has resulted in this *Strategic Outlook* document that will be presented at the next CSCH general assembly.

Feedback from CSCH Members

The CSCH membership responded with clear messages around targeted areas where the Society could make a meaningful contribution.

Impact

Themes included: influencing health policy, raising the profile and awareness about the circumstances and needs that affect the health of circumpolar people. It was also identified that the Society could make a much greater impact on the international stage and that international partnerships and collaborations should be promoted.

Strong messages were identified concerning the value of networking and creation of a sustainable network for exchange of knowledge, ideas and best practices that could “break the relative isolation that many [members] feel at various points in time”. Further, CSCH could play an important role in creating stronger linkages between the community, health care providers, health policy makers, and researchers. A major strength of CSCH is its multi-disciplinary approach, which positions the Society well to build bridges between community and health professional groups.

Public health, health education, and health promotion and disease prevention were identified as thematic areas where the Society could make a greater impact. Promoting research, research funding and nurturing young researchers were highly supported. In addition, opportunities to encourage aboriginal people to train and engage in aboriginal research initiatives were also identified.

The CSCH Council also discussed how research is conducted and how results are communicated back to a community in a relevant and meaningful way. Research is most useful when potential solutions are shared directly with the community. CSCH was seen as having a strong and respected link between the community, researchers and health policy-makers. CSCH could play a useful role in working with its community-based partners to develop principles and protocols as to how community-based research could best be conducted.

Energy and refocus

Specific recommendations with respect to more focused efforts by the Society over the next few years were noted. Build the membership base, stabilize and enhance funding to support Canadian participation in national and international meetings and strengthen the CSCH infrastructure and resource base.

In keeping with the areas of potential impact identified above, the Society was advised to focus on strengthening its role in promoting research initiatives as well as nurturing young researchers to pursue careers in circumpolar health.

Improve communication vehicles including a dynamic website, an electronic chat room and a regular newsletter. Continue support for the *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*. While there was strong support for promoting evidence-based research and best practices, it was encouraged that aboriginal traditional practices were not lost.

The CSCH was urged to assist young Northerners in identifying opportunities and wherever possible, to ensure that circumpolar peoples were partners in the Society’s efforts. The Society was also encouraged to facilitate more harmonious collaborations with aboriginal and non-aboriginal persons and groups who are engaged in shared efforts of advancing circumpolar health.

It is with the benefit of the above insights and perspectives that CSCH has developed a new vision, mission and values and proposed strategic directions that will guide the Society over the next six years.

Definition of Circumpolar Health

Circumpolar is defined as including all Arctic and sub-Arctic areas of Canada and including all indigenous peoples of Canada regardless of areas of residence.

Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

A circumpolar world where individuals, communities and people are empowered by knowledge to achieve better health.

Mission

Through partnership and networking, CSCH will promote research, exchange knowledge, and foster a greater awareness and response to the health issues of circumpolar people.

Values

Respect for circumpolar populations, traditional knowledge and the environment

Integrity in our actions

Responsibility and **accountability** to our members and to circumpolar populations

Inclusiveness and **openness** in conducting our work

Relationship with the community, health care providers and health policy research.

Strategic Directions and Implementation Goals

The Society has identified five key strategic directions and implementation goals to support achieving its vision, mission and values.

1. Facilitate partnerships and networking in circumpolar health at the local, national and international levels

- Ensure a continued, strong Canadian presence at the International Congress on Circumpolar Health
- Support efforts for interested parties to collaborate on areas of research, knowledge exchange and best practices in circumpolar health
- Promote active involvement of Northerners and circumpolar people in initiatives sponsored and supported by CSCH
- Seek out collaborations with other interested players to meet shared goals

2. Establish principles and a model for community-based research specific to circumpolar health

- Work with the community to establish effective approaches for partnering in research and to ensure relevancy of research to the community
- Use a multi-disciplinary team approach including researchers, policy makers, health care providers and consumers
- Explore best practices where community-based research in Northern communities has been successful

3. Promote circumpolar health research and share health research priorities

- Advocate for funding, greater focus and support for circumpolar health research
- Facilitate efforts to build northern infrastructure and human resource capacity to support research in circumpolar health
- Target and nurture young researchers to pursue careers in circumpolar health
- Conduct fact-finding or special projects in focused areas that can inform existing and new policies, and decision-making with respect to circumpolar health

4. Enhance the exchange of circumpolar health knowledge among individuals, communities and people

- Develop and use the CSCH website and other communication mechanisms to facilitate knowledge exchange and interaction amongst interested parties (eg. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*)
- Develop a clearinghouse for information on circumpolar health
- Promote strategies to translate circumpolar health research findings into practice
- Seek support for conferences, symposia and workshops to identify and address circumpolar health priorities

5. Foster a greater interest and awareness of the health issues of circumpolar people

- Enhance efforts to increase and retain active CSCH membership
- Increase frequency of Society's meetings to a minimum of one annual meeting, including hosting a Canadian Forum on Circumpolar Health

- Develop marketing and communication strategies to enhance the image and profile of CSCH
- Use evidence-based practice derived from research and best practices to inform policy-makers and decision-makers with respect to improving the health of circumpolar people

Implementation Priorities

In February 2004, the CSCH Council identified three implementation priorities for the next two years:

- Host a Canadian Forum on Circumpolar Health
- Build the membership base, market and enhance the profile of CSCH
- Establish CSCH as an information clearinghouse on circumpolar health

Three CSCH committees were established to support the above priorities: (1) CSCH Conference Committee; (2) CSCH Membership, Marketing and Fundraising Committee; and, (3) CSCH Clearinghouse Committee. Each CSCH Council member will participate on at least one committee. The intention is to expand participation on each of the committees by including external partners and drawing from the CSCH membership-at-large.

Conclusion

The Canadian Society for Circumpolar Health has a strong and proud twenty-year history that was inspired by the need and a commitment to circumpolar people and their health issues. We need to foster a broader awareness and to address the health issues of circumpolar people. The time is ripe to renew our commitment to circumpolar health and to set the Society on a clear course that allows it to achieve a “circumpolar world where individuals, communities and people are empowered by knowledge to achieve better health.”

Glossary of Terms

Best Practices

Best practices are processes that are consistent with health values/beliefs/ethics; activities/outputs; and, understanding of the environment that are most likely to achieve positive health outcomes in a given situation.

Evidence-based

Evidence-based practices are policies that are based on valid and reliable research.

Knowledge Translation

Knowledge translation is the exchange, synthesis and ethically-sound application of knowledge within a complex system of relationships among researchers and users (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2003).