

MANITOBA WOMEN'S  
HEALTH STRATEGY | 2011



## MINISTER'S GREETING

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As women, we know that we need to maintain healthy bodies, minds and spirits and that our overall well-being must be a priority in our lives. We've made the health of women a priority of our government.

This new Women's Health Strategy is the result of extensive consultation with Manitoba women and reaffirms our commitment to providing the best and most appropriate health services to them. The strategy endorses both a vision for women's health and tangible actions to achieve that vision. The new strategy calls on us to continue to work towards further collaboration and coordination and assure women take on leadership roles in the health care system.

Indeed they already have. In the years since the launch of the first Women's Health Strategy we've seen Manitoba's first female Minister of Health and first female Deputy Minister of Health. We've seen women as the CEOs of many of our Regional Health Authorities, including the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, the RHA that serves the largest population. We also have more than half of the positions on our RHA Board's of Directors held by women.

The new Women's Health Strategy is the culmination of considerable work by government, stakeholders and most importantly the women of Manitoba. We look forward to working together to address the health status of Manitoba women in the months and years ahead.

Theresa Oswald  
MINISTER, MANITOBA HEALTH

Jennifer Howard  
MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN.

## INTRODUCTION

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The initial Manitoba Women's Health Strategy was developed in 2000-2001 to provide a foundation on which to build a new approach to women's health. That strategy identified specific goals and projects which laid out a roadmap for government initiatives in the years that followed.

In 2009, the departments of Manitoba Health (MH) and Manitoba Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors (HLYS) partnered with Manitoba Status of Women to revisit the Women's Health Strategy. MH and HLYS also contracted the Women's Health Clinic, who participated in the original strategy, to assist in gathering information through a series of 10 regional consultations.

The results of those consultations have been used to inform this renewed strategy.

## BACKGROUND

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Women make up 51 per cent of the Canadian population. They are frequently the guardians of the health of other family members, and make up the largest number of health care providers and informal caregivers.

Women have different health issues than men. In addition to obvious differences related to reproductive health, women face an increased rate of chronic illnesses as they age, as well as higher rates of mental health concerns, such as depression. Issues of violence, poor economic status and lower incomes also affect more women than men.

The Manitoba Women's Health Strategy recognizes the distinct health needs of women in the planning, implementation and delivery of health care services. It seeks to address the broad range of women's health issues, and ensure awareness and responsiveness to gender differences in all aspects of health care delivery in Manitoba.

## GOALS

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The 2011 Manitoba Women's Health Strategy contains three basic goals:

- ▶ To improve the health and well-being of all women in Manitoba.
- ▶ To improve the use of gender-based planning and gender sensitive care throughout the health system.
- ▶ To increase knowledge and awareness of women's health and women's needs.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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The guiding principles are an integral part of the Manitoba Women's Health Strategy. They provide meaningful, practical guidelines that help foster an environment where individuals, community agencies, government and academia can work together more effectively to improve women's health.

### ▶ **Recognize Diversity**

Manitoba's women are diverse. Gender, race, ethnicity and culture, disability, age, income, geography and sexual orientation have an impact on women's health status. All Manitoba women need access to health services that take this diversity into account.

### ▶ **Women-centred Policies and Services**

Manitoba's health system needs to be responsive and sensitive to sex and gender differences and to women's health needs. Gender-based analysis of all health policies and programs must be part of all health planning and service delivery.

### ▶ **A Holistic Approach**

Health promotion and delivery must care for the whole person. This means promoting health and wellness through education and prevention of disease, and reducing risk factors that contribute to the poor health of women. Risk factors include social determinants of health like socio-economic status. A holistic approach means providing programs and services for women in all stages of life.

▶ **Knowledge Building**

Knowledge building and translation about women's health needs is important. Research that forms the basis of treatment methods must include the participation of both sexes. Resources allocated for research must reflect an equitable distribution between the specific health concerns of women and men. Knowledge of women's health needs must encompass physical, emotional and mental health. This information must be widely shared and available to the public.

▶ **Women are Represented**

To ensure women's health needs are reflected, the representation of women in decision-making roles is vital. Women, including Aboriginal, newcomer, women with disabilities, and northern women, must have an effective mechanism to influence government and the health care system by providing input on policies and services that impact their lives.

▶ **Collaboration and Coordination**

Addressing women's health issues requires the involvement of other levels of government and agencies. A coordinated and collaborative approach must be used which involves women in their communities, service providers, and all levels of government. This will improve coordination of policy, programs and services that impact women's lives.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & ACTIONS

Priorities will evolve and new priorities will be identified as new evidence, funding and opportunities become available. Actions include existing and new activities from multi-sectoral government partnerships working to improve women's health. Following are six initial priority areas to improve women's health in Manitoba.

## 1. Services

### **2009 Regional Health Consultations**

*Women valued access to women-centred care across Manitoba that was holistic, coordinated and tended to women's changing needs over the lifespan.*

Services will be gender-sensitive, equitable, comprehensive, integrated and culturally relevant. This will be accomplished by:

- Expanding women-centred health care services including:
  - Acute care services for women;
  - Health coverage for infertility treatment, and complementary health services;
  - Women-specific addiction treatment services including child care supports and gender specific harm reduction approaches;
  - Primary care;
  - Mental health services;
  - Increased coordination, options and supports for prenatal, birthing and postnatal services and supports across the province, especially in rural and northern regions;
  - Coordinated health information to improve women's access to personal health information and increase the number of health professionals who are working from the same health information.
  
- Improve supports for specific populations of women including:
  - Women with disabilities;
  - Lesbian, bi-sexual, trans-gender, two-spirited;
  - New Immigrant;
  - Sexually exploited youth;
  - Older women;
  - Aboriginal women, Métis and Inuit women;
  - Young girls and teens.

## Strategic Actions

- Enhance excellence in maternal and newborn service and programs by launching the new Women's Hospital and Birth Centre in Winnipeg, and new facilities in Selkirk, Notre Dame de Lourdes, and Pine Falls as well as increasing midwifery and birth services in rural Manitoba.
- Consider the development of a comprehensive women's treatment campus also identified in the FASD strategy. The campus would provide wrap around services, such as detox, treatment, continuing care, treatment with children, day care, case workers, medical care, on-site adjunct services such as EIA and CFS.
- Establish a working group to develop a pregnancy protocol for all funded addictions agencies.
- Continue the Project CHOICES Program which uses a woman-centred harm reduction approach to providing information and brief motivational intervention.
- Continue to work with the Government of Canada regarding the Winnipeg Drug Treatment Court to offer an alternative to serving time in prison for drug related, non-violent offenses.
- Develop Primary Care Networks which are patient-centred, integrated models of care, throughout Manitoba including in rural and northern communities.
- Launch the Community Crisis Response Centre providing mental health services.
- Maintain funding to the Laurel Centre for mental health support and services for women.
- Launch the Mobile Primary Health Care Unit to enhance access to primary care in rural areas.
- Enhance breastfeeding support, services and education by continuing to develop the Baby Friendly Manitoba breastfeeding initiative.
- Establish a Manitoba Maternal and Newborn Healthcare Services Network (MANHS) and a Manitoba Maternal and Child Healthcare

(MMACHS) Advisory Council to work collaboratively with RHAs to enhance maternal and child healthcare services and sustain progress on the implementation of initiatives identified by the Maternal and Newborn Healthcare Services (MACHS) Task Force including in particular:

- To coordinate and provide direction on maternal and child healthcare services.
  - Enhance supportive environments and services for mothers who must travel to Winnipeg for prenatal and birthing services.
  - Plan an annual event to improve knowledge and networking regarding maternal and child healthcare services.
  - Explore options to expand existing HPV immunization programs.
- Maintain funding for the TERF program at New Directions (Transition, Education and Resources for Females).
  - Continue development and implementation of Tracia's Trust Strategy (sexual exploitation strategy).
  - Expand access to nurse practitioners through the development of five Quick Care Clinics that will offer non-urgent primary care services, such as ear infections, immunizations and wound care, in convenient locations. The clinics will be open evenings and weekends.

## 2. Community

### **2009 Regional Health Consultations**

*Women expressed a desire to build strong families and communities that are mutually supportive and well connected.*

Create environments in the community for women based on safety, respect and dignity.

- Enable women to gather, support each other and build community through networks and community spaces.

- Develop programs and places that reduce isolation especially for new immigrant women, older women, women with disabilities and for women from northern communities, including those travelling to access services in urban areas.
- Create physical activity programs, information and environments for women and girls.

### Strategic Actions

- Pilot funding to support gatherings of rural and northern women for networking.
- Expand use of telehealth and other technology to encourage tele-visits between family members separated for care away from home.
- Continue the Neighbourhood Immigrant Settlement Program which provides settlement information, connects newcomers to programs and services, organizes special events and promotes awareness of newcomer needs.
- Continue community-based language training for newcomer women and seniors in geographical locations close to home with child-minding and assistance with other needs.
- Support the Recreational Opportunities for Children Program which provides eligible families with financial support up to \$250 per year per child for activities such as sports, dance or art lessons.
- Maintain the Support Services to Seniors Program which offers innovative programs through community based Seniors Resource Councils and Multi-Purpose Senior Centres to older adults living in the community such as congregate meal programs, recreational activities, social activities, and transportation programs.
- Continue to expand the Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative which supports older adults in leading active, socially engaged, independent lives that contribute to healthy aging.

### 3. Relationships

#### **2009 Regional Health Consultations**

*Women thought it important to ensure services and resources are well coordinated and attend to the inter-connections among the many health and well-being issues that women and their families experience.*

Develop policies, practices and programs that are relational and promote health connections to children, families and community.

- Strengthen connections across government to coordinate policy and programs on issues of women's health and well-being.
- Support women in their multiple roles and relationships, particularly as parents and caregivers.
- Enhance women-centred, holistic health promotion and wellness services.
- Address and improve health disparities especially for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women.

#### **Strategic Actions**

- Monitor the implementation of the Women's Health Strategy and develop innovative interdepartmental responses to women's issues through a partnership with The Gender Equality Interdepartmental Committee (GEIC)
- Support the Triple P Positive Parenting Program which offers an effective, practical approach to raising children that emphasizes the positive.
- Provide support to the Manitoba Coalition on Alcohol and Pregnancy. This province-wide, community coalition provides a forum for service providers, families and government to share ideas, information, and resources about FASD, alcohol and pregnancy prevention, and intervention initiatives.

- Continue support to the Sexuality Education Resource Centre to provide workshops to newcomer families on a range of topics, including parenting, intergenerational communication, healthy relationships, and sexual and reproductive health.
- Support single parents (mainly women) who are on income assistance and experiencing mental health issues to improve parenting skills, achieve higher marks in school and find employment through the Parent Wellness Initiative.
- Develop spiritual health care services in every region, addressing gender specific issues of spirituality related to: counseling, bereavement, religious and cultural realities, treatment methods, and wholeness and connection.
- Launch the Age-Friendly Intergenerational Initiative which will create respectful intergenerational relationships by implementing and supporting intergenerational programs in Manitoba.

#### 4. Economic and Social Status

##### **2009 Regional Health Consultations**

*Women spoke about the impacts that poverty, housing, nutrition and food security have on the overall health of women and their families. The Profile of Women's Health in Manitoba offers research supporting the importance of these factors as determinants of women's health.*

Improve women's socio-economic conditions.

- Support affordable rental and transitional housing for women.
- Support women with low-incomes especially women living with children, older women, women with disabilities and aboriginal women to improve their standard of living.
- Create opportunities for women to improve their employability skills.

- Improve food security throughout Manitoba and access to fresh food in the north.
- Increase community and personal safety for women and their families.

### Strategic Actions

- Maintain support for Homeless strategies, including the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative, Community Wellness Initiative, Homeless Outreach Project (HOM), Project Breakaway, and Portable Housing Benefit.
- Support the Rewarding Work Strategy – a four year strategy to help low-income working families to move from welfare to work.
- Be in alignment with the All Aboard Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy and it's initiatives including the First People's Economic Growth Fund, Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, Family Violence Prevention program, Healthy Baby Community Support Programs and Manitoba Prenatal Benefits.
- Continue development of the Good Behaviour Game – a proven method of preventing lifetime antisocial and criminal behaviour, and mental health and behaviour problems.
- Maintain and continue to expand the Provincial Elder Abuse Strategy which includes support for the Seniors Abuse Support Line; the development of community and regional response teams; support for the Safe Suite Program; support for elder abuse services in Winnipeg; development of educational and awareness resources; and the development of a provincial elder abuse network.
- Explore opportunities for a women and skilled trades program.
- Continue developing the Aging in Place Strategy, part of Manitoba's Health's Long Term Care Strategy which addresses the need for affordable housing options for older adults, with varying levels of support through the development of alternative types of housing (supportive housing, supports to seniors in group living and personal care homes).

## 5. Policy and Planning

### **2009 Regional Health Consultations**

*Women noted the importance of paying attention to the differences in women's health in policy and programs, including sexual and reproductive health, sex-specific symptoms and disease, and the impact of care giving responsibilities on access to health care.*

Ensure that gender differences are considered in research, policy and program development.

- Establish an ongoing gender based and women's health research deliverable.
- Improve capacity for gender and diversity analysis for policy and program planners across government and in the regions.

### **Strategic Actions**

- Provide government-wide gender and diversity analysis training, delivered through the Government of Manitoba's Organization and Staff Development.

## 6. Public Education and Health Literacy

### **2009 Regional Health Consultations**

*Women felt that more public awareness and information sharing about women's health issues would be beneficial.*

Share knowledge and information about women's health.

- Share knowledge about women's health risks, prevention and positive health practices for women.
- Increase understanding about how women's health issues are different than men's.
- Increase knowledge about women's health specific issues amongst girls in public schools.

- Improve access to plain language health information for women, including accessible formats for women with disabilities and older women.
- Increase knowledge and awareness for aboriginal and immigrant women about health issues of concern for them and their families.

### Strategic Actions

- Continue support and development of the Teen Talk Website (by Klinik Community Health Centre) for youth to access information on sexual health, dangers of alcohol use during pregnancy, pregnancy prevention and supports for teen parents.
- Continue work with other departments on the pilot of Life Skills Training, one of the world's most effective, evidence-based substance use prevention programs.
- Support women's health days in rural and northern communities.
- Distribute the newly developed Living in Manitoba: A Resource Guide for Women with Disabilities, and continue to distribute Living in Manitoba: A Resource Guide for Immigrant Women.
- Support education and public awareness at post secondary institutions by funding workshops targeting mothers and youth, and training of health care professionals related to female genital cutting.
- Improve availability of public information and resources in Aboriginal languages.
- Continue distribution of the 4Girls Only! empowerment guide for girls in grades 6 – 8.
- Explore opportunities to expand the delivery of self-esteem workshops for girls across Manitoba.

