

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COALITION

COMMUNITY SCAN

OSOYOOS, BRITISH COLUMBIA

March, 2014

METHODOLOGY

Twenty members of the community of Osoyoos were interviewed during February and March 2014 to determine their perception of the health of our community and their awareness of policies and programs in the town that influence the community to make healthy choices. Specific pillars of health were identified by Interior Health as being important parameters of a healthy community.

We probed respondents to identify specific programs in recreation, healthy eating, programs targeted to seniors, children, low income, aboriginals, mental health, smoking cessation, and safe environment. Information was supplemented by a scan of relevant public websites. The respondents were identified as individuals involved in policy-making and program implementation and other representatives of the diverse segments of the population. Respondents were also asked for referrals of other individuals who may have knowledge in this area.

A copy of the questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

FINDINGS

OVERALL PERCEPTION OF THE HEALTH OF OUR COMMUNITY

Most people surveyed rate the overall health of our community as above average. People of all ages are seen walking throughout the town. We have a higher proportion of seniors in town, and while we tend to see more chronic illnesses in an aging population, many people, including retirees are working to be healthy.

There is some concern that amongst young people high access to technology interferes with free play. Although Osoyoos is a very safe town parents may be afraid to let their younger kids go out to play unsupervised. People are very busy and their priorities to manage their daily lives may supersede their focus on making healthy choices.

One public health worker expressed concern that some seniors lack transportation to access good healthcare and recreation. This may lead to social isolation and depression for some. Younger families may lack job security leading to anxiety and depression as well. A scan of health records in the past has indicated a higher than average incidence of COPD, diabetes and depression.

Several people speculate that although there are lots of recreation options and our weather is conducive to being outdoors, it is usually the same people who are active and involved in sports and recreation.

Lower socioeconomic segments of our population of any age or cultural background are the most vulnerable to poor health and the most in-need of support. However, we do not have a reliable means of measuring this.

Because transportation in town is very limited, people who are confined to wheel chair or have other physical disabilities may not be using town recreation resources.

PUBLIC POLICIES TO SUPPORT HEALTHY CHOICES

Most people are not aware of specific policies and by-laws to encourage our constituents to make healthy choices.

The following by-laws and policies were mentioned by some respondents.

- Building by-laws ensure that there is proper access in newly constructed public buildings. Many of our older buildings continue to be retrofitted so that ramps and elevators offer access to all area of public buildings.
- The town has collaborated with the schools to offer a healthy lunch program. Vending machines at the schools and in the Sonora Centre offer healthy snacks and drinks, including water, juice and sugar-free pop.
- Food vendors who park at the beach are encouraged to offer healthy options on their menu.
- Our non-smoking by-law prohibits smoking in and around public buildings, in parks and on the beach
- Our water and sewage by-laws ensure safe drinking water
- We offer curbside recycling in town
- Many sidewalks are maintained and lit for safe walking
- Our subdivision by-law ensures adequate green spaces
- The town has developed and maintains a network of walking trails

It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of these policies. They provide a framework for healthy living. Public policies have an associated cost to monitor and enforce. Our by-law officer will charge anyone breaking smoking by-laws. The fines have been raised 'to the max' as a deterrent to public smoking. One councillor commented that there is always room to do more, but the annual budget does limit what we do.

Recreation policy is guided by the Official Community Plan. A document called Osoyoos Succeeds defines the principles for success in our community. Some notable highlights are:

- Residents are able to meet their basic needs in a safe and dignified manner, including health and affordable food, shelter, education, personal development opportunities and health care, including physical and spiritual health.
- Community members have access to medical services through locally available core services and a supportive transportation system to access more specialized regional health care services.

- Equitable and sufficient wages, benefits, and training opportunities help make it possible for community members of all ages to live, work and play in Osoyoos.
- Neighbourhoods in Osoyoos are diverse, attractive, safe and multigenerational.
- Facilities, programs and community groups promote healthy and active lifestyles for all residents.
- There is a spirit of inclusivity and volunteerism in the community that encourages people of all ages and abilities to participate in and contribute to community activities, events and services.

PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY CHOICES

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & RECREATION

When thinking of programs that encourage healthy choices, our recreation programs are top-of-mind. There are a wide variety of public and commercial options available for all ages.

The staff at the Sonora Centre tries to be very responsive to its clientele. If a program is popular it will be expanded. For example Pickle Ball and Fit for Life exercises have both recently gone from twice a week to three times weekly. Conversely, when a program is poorly attended it is replaced. Over 135 people have gone through the weight training orientation in the past 4 years. The coordinator of that program has noticed that most of those folks continue to use the weight room or move on to other programs in the gym. She knows that it is making a difference. For an additional fee members can access the weight room outside of normal hours; 79 people are taking advantage of that service.

Programs are scheduled throughout the day so that they are available to all ages. The following programs are currently available through the Sonora Centre.

- Fitness classes
- Yoga
- Pickle ball
- Hockey
- Drop-in winter skating, drop-in hockey, stick and puck
- Soccer
- Skate park
- Swimming at the lake
- Splash park
- Tennis
- Weight room
- Strong start (kids 0-4)
- Boys and girls club (10-16)
- Youth drop-in Wednesdays and Thursdays after school
- Learn to run
- Basketball courts

- Hiking program (\$10 – includes transportation to the trail head)
- Walking Trails – Pioneer Walk, Haynes Point; Canal trail, Kobo Mountain, Strawberry Creek
- Playgrounds Kinsmen Park, Lions Park, Sonora Centre
- Slow-Pitch
- Volleyball
- Squash

In addition to public programs, there are some inexpensive options in town through non-profit organizations:

- Seniors' centre: Tai chi, dancing, line dancing, lawn bowling, 2-mile walk
- Legion: yoga (\$5)
- Dragon boating/paddling
- Curling

Several private commercial options include: Breathe Studio, 180Degree Fitness, Vengeance Fitness, Matrix Yoga, bowling, figure skating, dance and aquafit at the Adriatic Motel. The Osoyoos Physiotherapy Clinic runs a 'Falls Prevention' class.

Access to Recreational Services: The town has been very successful in developing recreation programs for all ages through the Sonora Centre. These programs range from organized sports to drop-in, unstructured play. There is a charge for all programs but an effort is made to keep fees as low as possible. Some programs are offered at a very low cost. The annual pass to the Sonora Centre is available in early September at a 30% discount for families and individuals. In addition there is a recreation fund to subsidize families who are financially limited in accessing programs.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Our population limits the number of public health services available locally. Most local public health resources are shared between Osoyoos and Oliver. Primary care is available locally and in Oliver (20 minutes away); tertiary care is available in Penticton (an hour away) and Kelowna (2 hours away). There is a regular transit bus that travels to and from Penticton and Kelowna on week days.

Local services support patients with chronic diseases, mental health issues and homecare needs through physician referral. Interior Health nurses counsel patients one-to-one on medication, lifestyle and eating habits to support optimal health. Interior Health offers an exercise rehab program at the Sonora Centre. This program is designed to help patients recovering from stroke, heart attack or any other condition that has limited their activity. Physicians can refer their patients to the program for five weeks of supervised exercise. These patients often go on to develop a regular exercise routine at an appropriate level. Community care coordinates home support for patients who are shut-in. This may include assistance with medications, wound care, and bedside care.

Volunteer services such as Better at Home, Meals on Wheels, and Dinners at Home, the Soup Kitchen and the local Food Bank fill in some of the gaps in community support. The United Way is an important funder of these volunteer services.

A number of private home support services are also available. Individual nurses and care aides attend clients in their home on a fee-for-service basis.

Access to Public Health Services: Public Health services are covered by MSP for BC residents. Access is limited to the number of hours that the nurses and care workers are available. There may be a wait of several weeks, depending upon the urgency of the need.

There is no apparent process to monitor how well these services cover the needs of the community. Constituents requiring services not available through Interior Health are left to their own resources to meet their needs.

Everyone agrees that there are people in our community who probably do not know that some of these services are available. Mobility issues may restrict access for some people. Although 'Better at Home' is a well-known service available to seniors, it is totally dependent upon volunteers to drive clients. They provide transportation and some home support and light housekeeping.

There are no programs through Interior Health to specifically provide education on the role of nutrition in the prevention of diseases. People who are concerned about their risk of illness, perhaps because of family history, could contact the health centre and ask for guidance on preventing disease. This service would be provided on a one-to-one basis. There would have to be significant numbers of people requesting preventative disease classes to warrant offering group sessions.

A group of volunteer nurses run a prevention program 'Choosing Wellness' once a week at the Cactus Centre. This program is only available in the winter months when the number of seniors in town is highest. This program is available to all seniors in town, but is primarily frequented by winter residents (snow birds).

The local pharmacies occasionally sponsor public forums on health and disease prevention. They are open to partnering with the community in these initiatives when needed.

NUTRITION

Most participants in this study are unaware of programs to help people make healthy food choices.

The most frequently mentioned include the 'Healthy Lunch' program, the 'Muffin Program' at the school and the addition of health options in vending machines. Street vendors are encouraged to offer a variety of foods, including healthy options.

There is little evidence of programs to teach people the principles of healthy eating. Desert Sun, a federally funded outreach service, runs a kitchen literacy program for new immigrants. It helps them adapt to Canadian food customs. In the past, the Sonora Centre distributed the Canadian Food Guide.

They have occasionally conducted classes on healthy eating on a budget. There has been a limited response to these programs.

Desert Sun also provides the 'CAPC' program, 'Community Access Program for Children', offering a community kitchen and garden. This out-reach program is targeted to families with young children. They support new mothers pre-and post- natal to raise healthy children for the first 6 years of life. They coach them on eating well during pregnancy, encourage breast feeding and teach good nutrition for themselves and their family. The attendees grow their own produce or purchase local produce and learn to cook economical, healthy meals. They also offer pre-and post-natal vitamins and food vouchers. The director of this program is concerned that, although these services are available to everyone in the community, fewer people take advantage of them because there is a stigma associated with Desert Sun, a social assistance organization.

Market on Main operates during the summer to connect the community with local growers. Fresh in-season is available every Saturday.

TOBACCO REDUCTION

Provincial by-laws ensure that cigarettes are less accessible to the public and specifically not sold to minors. Smoking is not allowed in public parks and beaches. As a deterrent, the town has maximized the fines charged for infringements of these by-laws.

The schools run educational programs on the risks of smoking. There are no public programs to assist people in stopping smoking. The local pharmacy runs a federally supported program called 'Quit now'.

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

The town by-laws provide the framework for a healthy environment in our community. Affordable housing is always an issue. The Elks Villa provides some affordable housing for seniors. There are no known community programs to assist people who are challenged to find affordable accommodations. The programs that are available are primarily supported through community organizations and a strong volunteer base. There is a recognized need for economic expansion in the town to provide stable year-round employment for young families. New industry will expand the tax base and increase funding for public programs.

PROGRAMS TARGETED TO SENIORS

Osoyoos has the second highest percentage of elderly people of any BC community. Seniors are welcomed and included in any of the public programs offered. In addition, the Seniors Centre offers specific programs of interest to seniors, including exercise, tai chi, and dance.

No nutrition programs are currently available or targeted to seniors, and yet many of them could benefit from learning how to eat nutritiously on a fixed budget. They enjoy the opportunity to get out and attend programs that are offered. However, one senior wondered how receptive seniors would be to

the information, since they are often set in their ways. It would be important to link healthy food choices with health improvement.

Access to Programs for Seniors: Mobility is an issue for many seniors. Many live alone and are often isolated. They may require encouragement to keep active. The Seniors Centre is an important social connection for their physical and mental well-being.

The 'Better at Home' program is an important service that helps seniors get around town. They can schedule volunteer drivers to take them shopping or to-and-from appointments. They are expanding their program to provide volunteers to do light housekeeping and home support.

While most seniors are on a fixed income, the town offers a variety of exercise programs at a very low cost. In addition there is free access to walkways, parks and beaches. Some may need the motivation of group walking or swimming to encourage them to develop a routine. A daily or bi-weekly group promoted out of the Seniors Centre would be appropriate and enhance their social experience.

PROGRAMS TARGETED TO LOW INCOME INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

Free skating, parks and playgrounds are all available to everyone in town. In addition, there are funds available through the Sonora Centre to ensure that families have access to organized recreation. There is no way to monitor whether those who need this support are aware of it or using it. Equipment swaps are run annually. Private sponsors have provided grants so youngsters can play hockey.

The Food Bank, local Churches and Desert Sun offer food services to those in need.

PROGRAMS TARGETED TO ABORIGINALS

The Osoyoos Indian Band runs a number of programs on the reserve. All of our community programs are open to the band. When the town creates a new program we work together with them. Access and transportation issues are similar to those in the town.

PROGRAMS TARGETED TO MENTAL HEALTH

Any programs to specifically support mental health are run through public health. Constituents with mental health issues have access to all of the town's programs and facilities if they are able.

Of more concern is the potential for isolation in Osoyoos. Although our town is small, if people are not able to easily get around or do not live within walking distance of facilities they will be less inclined to use them. One health worker believes that more effort is needed to draw isolated individuals into the community so they can participate. This could reduce the incidence of depression. Such a program would have to be developed through the medical community to respect issues of privacy.

PROGRAMS TARGETED TO CHILDREN

This is one group that benefits from a wide variety of facilities and programs available in Osoyoos to support healthy choices. The programs are in place and subsidies are available if needed. There is an emphasis on healthy eating through the schools and community.

Desert Sun focuses on getting young children off to a healthy start. The one concern is that the programs offered may be under-utilized. Some young families may not be aware of the services available or motivated to participate. Game technology may be an activity choice that requires less effort. There may even be a stigma associated with asking for assistance or participating in an outreach program. We have no way of knowing what proportion of young children are involved in these programs. But we do know that this is an important start to a healthy community long term.

School programs are effective in continuing to choose a healthy lifestyle. Our community is a relatively safe environment for both structured and unstructured community play. Group-play environments such as play grounds, skate parks, arenas and drop-in sports facilities encourage healthy activities for youth. This offers a healthy alternative to computer activities. We need to continue to motivate informal group play as our youth develop. One way to do this is to offer free trial periods – where staff are available to introduce the services. We need to develop the means to monitor the use of these programs by those who ‘need it most’.

The Leisure Guide, the Osoyoos Wellness Guide and the local newspaper are all effective ways to promote our programs. However, constituents may miss these publications. It is important to explore other current channels of communication that are frequented by families and individuals. These may include websites, Facebook, and public bulletin boards. Word-of-mouth is often the most effective way to communicate. We might consider developing a ‘Bring a Friend’ program or a community awareness day.

Most people know that physical activity, eating healthy foods, avoiding smoking are all determinants of a healthy life, but the community may not make the connection to participate in these activities. To sustain a healthy community we need to continue to communicate this connection.

Access to programs: Hiking, swimming, skating, and playgrounds are available at no charge. Since there is no public transport, some people may have difficulty getting to and from facilities.

MOST EFFECTIVE EFFORTS TO SUPPORT A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

The Town of Osoyoos 'does recreation' well. There are a wide variety of programs available to everyone. We are responsive to our patrons. We try to expand programs based upon client requests. Our programs are open to all cultures, all ages and all physical abilities. Physical access to the facilities is excellent.

Our playgrounds, trails, walkways and green spaces are well maintained. Because of our moderate climate and safe community, we can get outdoors to golf, walk, cycle, swim, and play almost year-round.

Our programs are reasonably priced; drop-in programs, including the weight room and fitness classes are included in a family membership. Financial support is available for children's programs if needed.

Our town policies emphasize community and individual health, and provide inclusive access to all of our programs. The town promotes accessibility and highlights its efforts on 'Accessibility Day'.

GREATEST CHALLENGE TO SUPPORT A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

A number of challenges have been identified to support a healthy community.

Economic Development: The need to attract industry and a larger financial base to Osoyoos continues to impact our town on many levels. When families do not have a stable income they are limited in their ability to access programs and make the healthiest food choices. They need motivation and direction on how to optimize their budget. As the economy of the town grows, we will have additional tax resources to develop more programs to support healthy lifestyle choices.

Physical Activity: It is important to continue to provide recreational options and respond to clients' needs for new programs. We continue to work on green spaces and provide shaded walkways throughout town.

Most believe that there is an above average awareness about the importance of choosing a healthy lifestyle to reduce the potential for chronic disease. They also feel that there is a higher than average participation in physical activities. However many question that those who are most in need of this information are either unaware or are not doing much to change their lifestyle. The issue then is how to reach these people and support and motivate them.

Nutrition: Most feel that programs on nutrition and healthy food choices for every budget are inadequate. This is especially true of programs targeted to young adults, adults and seniors. When offered in the past, the response to these programs has usually been disappointing, so it is a challenge to develop programs that will be entertaining and relevant to everyone. . It is important that group programs are developed to keep costs under control and create a community sprit around the benefits of healthy living. Desert Sun has developed a good model to teach families practical tools to making healthy food choices. Community care coordinators at Interior Health could partner in these programs

As a community we can tie it all together through education in conjunction with accessible programs available to everyone. Some believe that it is important not to single out specific demographic groups. These programs need to be promoted in a way that they will compete favorably with electronic activities, possibly even incorporating some electronic interaction. Most other organizations now accept the popularity of portals like Facebook. Can we provide access to electronic monitoring programs so people can be involved in tracking their progress? 'We need to make healthy choice an easy choice.'

People have very busy lives and may be easily distracted from their intentions to make healthy choices. New people are always moving to Osoyoos. It is beneficial to repeatedly communicate the availability and importance of our programs. Traditional media reach a portion of our community. Should we consider popular media such as radio, and the internet? Should we orientate the community to our programs and services more frequently? A 'Health Day', and a quarterly 'Open House', or a 'Bring a Friend for Free' program are all suggestions to increase exposure and re-motivate people to participate or affirm their continued involvement in a healthy lifestyle. Local pharmacists, social services and health

professionals are willing to participate in these efforts. Shuttle services would provide additional access. If a few more families or individuals are positively impacted it will benefit our whole community long term.

Most services are within walking or cycling distance for most people. We need to insure that our roads are walkable and well-lit. Because the main artery through town is a provincial highway it would be helpful to develop a bicycle route through town. These wider streets could have a bicycle lane and be marked to alert vehicles. Some area of town such as the golf course and east bench are further away from facilities and transportation is required to access community services. The children's program that runs in the Cactus Centre during the summer uses the town bus to take participants to the water slide. Can we expand on this idea to develop a shuttle service to and from the Sonora Centre and green spaces? Can we work with BC transit to create a few transit stops across town? Is there an economical way to finance these programs with prepaid passes and subsidies for seniors and families? Transportation is an even greater a challenge for people with mobility issues regardless of where they live. 'Better at Home' is a valuable access resource for these seniors.

It is apparent that volunteers are an important aspect of our community programs. Organizations and individuals go a long way to fill in the gaps and support the community. This has helped to take the pressure off the town budget. We need to continue to acknowledge their commitment.

APPENDIX

INTRODUCTION:

As a person who works closely with the people in our community, I would like to ask for your help in developing a audit of the resources available to our community to help people make healthy lifestyle choices? We are looking at both policies and programs.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is poor and 10 is excellent, how would you rate the overall health of our community?
2. Why do you say that?
3. Are there specific populations in our community who are less healthy than others?

POLICIES

4. What public policies are you aware of in our community that facilitate/encourage constituents to make healthy choices?
5. For each policy mentioned, on a scale of 1 -5 where 1 is totally ineffective and 5 is extremely effective, how effective do you think that policy is?

PROGRAMS

6. Now thinking about programs, both public programs and those supported by organizations
What programs are you aware of that are available in Osoyoos that promote healthy lifestyle?
7. For each program mentioned, what percentage of people who could benefit from these programs do you think take advantage of this program?

PILLARS

Now I would like to take a few more minutes to probe some specific areas of interest.

8. The coalition has identified 5 key pillars that are critical to a healthy lifestyle; I wonder if you are aware of any specific programs in these areas.

I Physical Activity:

II Healthy Eating/Food Security:

III Tobacco Reduction:

IV Healthy Environment (housing, community plans, water, land use etc):

V Programs/Services targeted to:

Seniors

Low income

Aboriginal

Mental Health

Children (public school)

Children (grade school and under)

Youth (high school)

9. In your opinion, what is the most effective thing our town does to support a healthy lifestyle in our community?

10. What is the single greatest challenge our town faces in supporting healthy lifestyle in our community?