

Brief History of People Assessing Their Health (PATH)

October 2009

The First PATH Project

The first People Assessing Their Health (PATH) Project was conceived in the mid-1990s during a time of health system restructuring in Nova Scotia, when a certain amount of planning and decision making related to health services was being devolved to the regional and community level. The goal of the project was to provide a means for people in selected communities within the Eastern Health Region to identify, define and assess all aspects of health in their communities so that they would become effective participants in a decentralized health system. The project was funded by the Health Promotion Contribution Fund of the Health Promotion and Social Development Office of Health Canada and was carried out from 1996 to 1997. The project partners were the Antigonish Women's Association, the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University, and the Public Health Nursing Services of the Eastern Health Region.

The project was carried out in three Nova Scotia communities: two rural and one urban. Two part-time project coordinators provided support and training for local facilitators who used a variety of adult education and community development techniques to engage people in examining the many factors that affect health and well-being. Each community developed its own unique community health impact assessment tool (CHIAT) based on the factors that they identified. The CHIATs were tested on hypothetical projects and a regional workshop was held at the conclusion of the project to celebrate the work and launch a toolkit entitled *PATHways to Building Healthy Communities in Northeastern Nova Scotia: The PATH Project Resource*.

The PATH Network

The PATH Network evolved from the Regional Advisory Committee of the first PATH Project. It brings together people from community-based organizations, health services, community health boards, and universities. In its mission statement

it is defined as: "A network of groups and individuals, sharing ideas and resources to build healthy communities in northeastern Nova Scotia." The Network¹ meets on an *ad hoc* basis to share information and develop ways to promote the PATH Process.

The Second PATH Project

The second PATH project, officially titled *Applying Community Health Impact Assessment to Rural Community Health Planning*, was funded by Health Canada's Remote and Rural Health Initiatives Fund and was carried out from December 2000 to March 2002. The project sponsors were the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University, and Public Health Services (Districts 7 & 8). The sponsors subsequently partnered with the Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board (ATCCHB). The goal of the project was to increase the capacity of volunteers by developing the process and tools for community health impact assessment, which would enable informed decision making in community level health planning.

PATH II focused on developing and testing a community health impact assessment tool tailored to the needs of the Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board. It also looked at ways to increase access to the range of information needed for evidence-based decision making as well as ways to share information and lessons learned through the project.

The Community Health Board CHIAT was tested with three community groups: the Antigonish Town Council, a local breastfeeding advocacy group, and the Community Health Board itself. A resource package, *PATHways II: The Next Steps – A guide to community health impact assessment*, was produced and widely distributed.

¹ For more information about the Network, visit: <http://www.antigonishwomenscentre.com/path.htm>.



Recent PATH Initiatives

Since the completion of the second PATH Project, the PATH Network has been engaged in or associated with several initiatives.

- The Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board CHIAT has been used by a variety of groups to assess the impact of various proposed projects and policies (groups include the Antigonish Affordable Housing Society, the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, the Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority, and the Antigonish County Adult Literacy Association).
- PATH Network members have facilitated the PATH Process and development of CHIATs in the Town of Canso and with a group in Pictou County.
- In collaboration with the Coady International Institute at St. Francis Xavier University, the PATH Process has been used with the Association for Social and Health Advancement (ASHA), based in Kolkata, India, with staff and board members, volunteers in the field, and two community groups.
- PATH Network members continue to make presentations at conferences and workshops at the provincial, national and international levels.
- PATH Network members have had articles published in peer-reviewed journals and other international publications.

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The documents mentioned in this Fact Sheet are available at: www.antigonishwomenscentre.com/reports.htm.

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