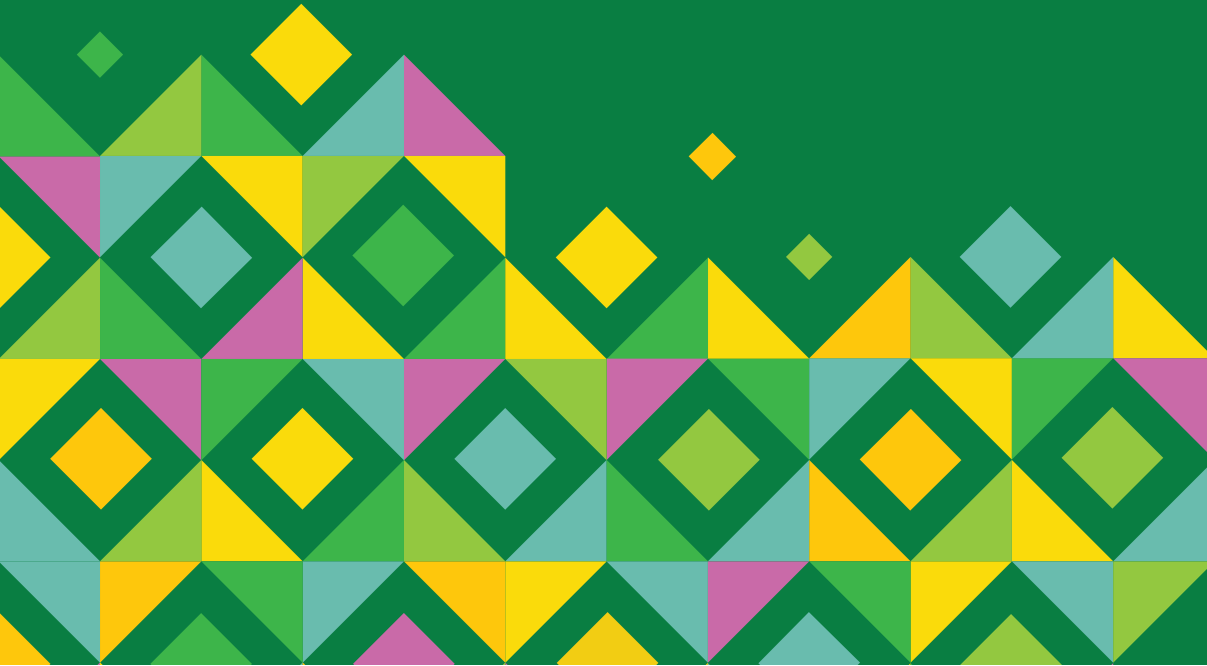




UNIVERSITY  
OF ALBERTA



CENTRE FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

# Social Transformation through Research, Engagement, and Enhancing Use of Knowledge

July 2024

CENTRE FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

# Centre for Healthy Communities

## Scientific Director Message

The Centre for Healthy Communities in the School of Public Health was built on the vision to help forge a future for every community that is healthy, sustainable, and flourishing. This is a vision of social transformation – a collective process that reimagines the building blocks of society and takes steps to enact that reimagination for the good of all. At the Centre for Healthy Communities, we focus on root causes of poor health and work collaboratively with many sectors and disciplines to better understand how to take effective action on the social and structural conditions that shape people’s wellbeing.



Drawing inspiration from the World Health Organization’s Geneva Charter for Well-being and recognizing the interrelationships between human and planetary health, our work attends to improving equity, health, social, and ecological outcomes. As you will see in this year’s annual report, the Centre for Healthy Communities directly contributes to social transformation by working with decision-makers and practitioners to effectively use public health evidence to create policies and programs that improve health and wellbeing, and tackle critical societal issues such as financial insecurity, social cohesion, water scarcity, and community safety and wellbeing.

Engagement is essential to the social transformation process. Like a stone thrown in a pond, where the ripples start small and then expand as the moments pass, engagement helps incremental actions become larger changes over time. This year, the Centre for Healthy Communities hosted two high-profile and well-attended major events that sparked idea sharing and network building across Canada. These events are profiled in this report, along with the impact of our regular engagement events and ongoing research projects.

At the Centre for Healthy Communities, we believe that by working intersectorally to advance the health, wellbeing, and sustainability of communities, we are also advancing public health science and knowledge, creating welcoming spaces for shared dialogue among diverse stakeholders, and helping to build capacity among those actors who create the conditions for health and wellbeing in communities and workplaces. I am proud to share with you the Centre’s 2023-2024 annual report that highlights how, this year, we brought together the best of healthy communities’ experience, science, and practice to inspire transformation and positive change in communities.

In closing, I express my ongoing admiration for the outstanding team of staff, trainees, and Members of the Centre for Healthy Communities with whom I humbled to work with on all of our initiatives. They are transforming how we foster healthier communities, together.

**Candace Nykiforuk, PHD, CE**

Scientific Director, Centre for Healthy Communities

Professor, School of Public Health

University of Alberta

# Transforming Healthy Communities Landscapes through Research

Leading innovative, engaged, healthy communities research that brings together practice and policy professionals, researchers, and trainees from a range of sectors. Through this research, we are advancing collectively identified actions that tackle the root causes of poor health and wellbeing. Our research leads to transformational changes in systems by helping to shape policies and programs to address societal public health issues now and into the future.

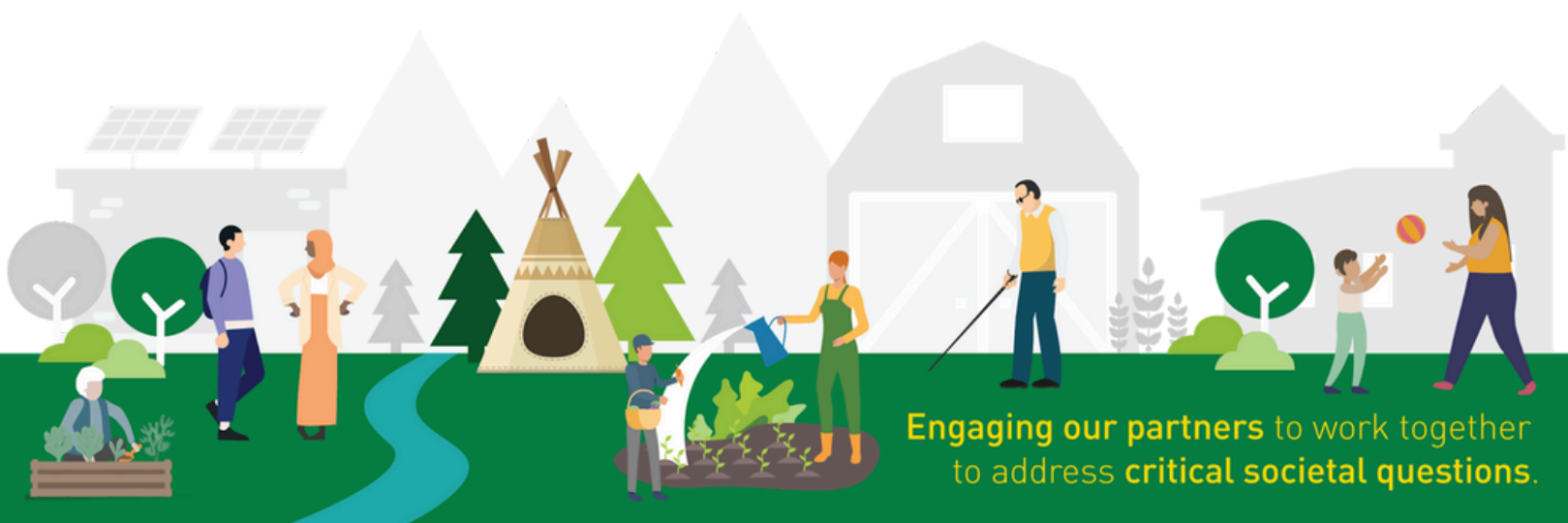
Ground-breaking applied research led by the Centre for Healthy Communities transforms the healthy communities landscape by:

- Bringing together an interdisciplinary group of academics with practice and policy professionals to answer timely questions that impact community health, equity, and sustainability
- Providing evidence-based tools for practice
- Directly informing policy and programs in different sectors and jurisdictions

Highlights of Centre for Healthy Communities 2023-2024 research development activities:

- 7 peer-reviewed publications
- 3 evidence-based reports to inform policy and practice
- 6 active evidence-based tools for practice
- 4 active Centre for Healthy Communities-led peer-reviewed grants (3 new in 2023-2024)
- 3 active Centre for Healthy Communities-partnered peer-reviewed grants (1 new in 2023-2024)
- 3 active service contracts (2 new in 2023-2024)

**Impact of these activities: Generating innovative and rigorous evidence that influences policy and practice locally to internationally.**



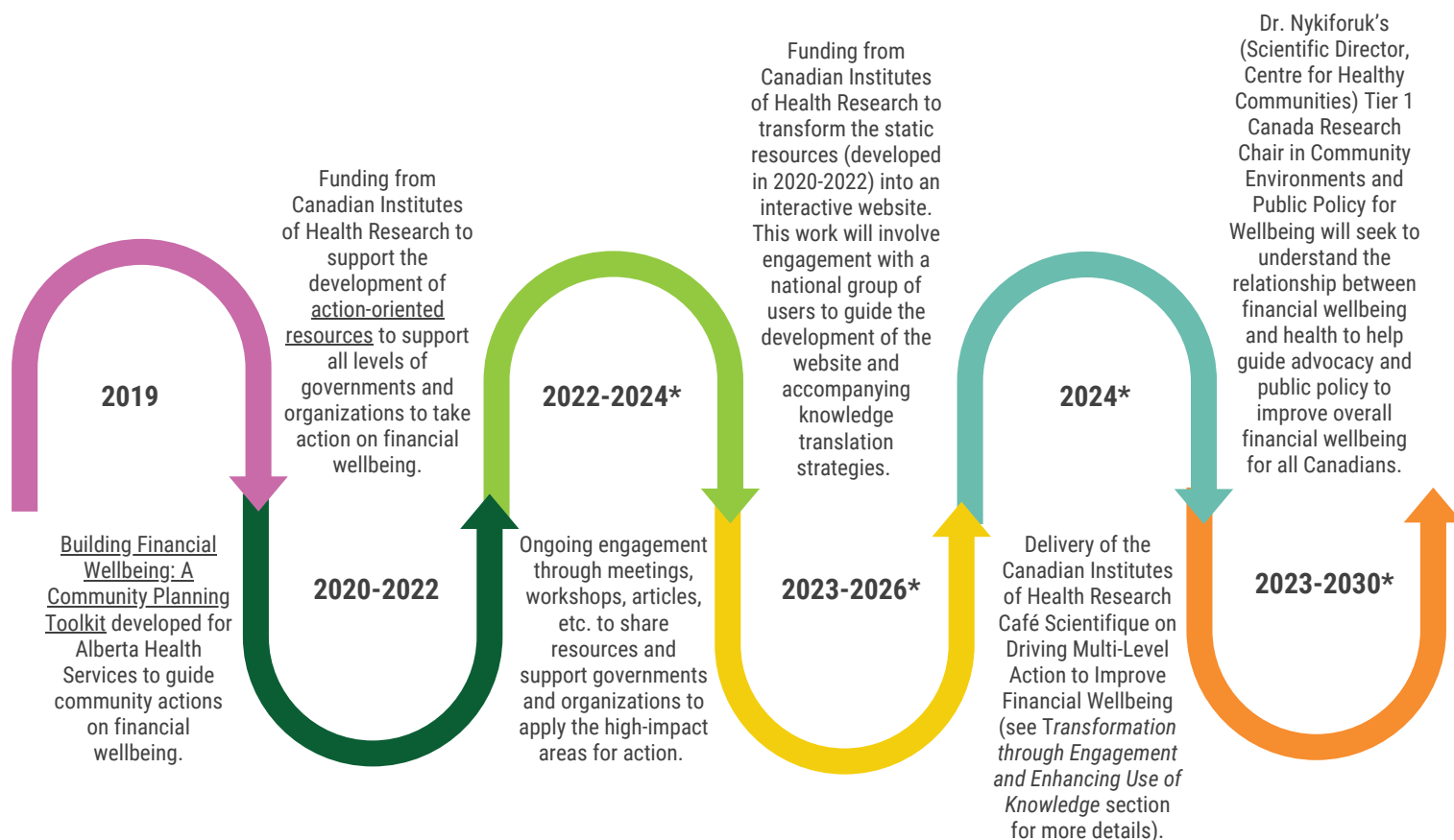
**Engaging our partners to work together to address critical societal questions.**

# Research Highlight: Actively Supporting Organizations and Governments to Improve Financial Wellbeing for All

The Centre for Healthy Communities' financial wellbeing program of research is leading the way for systems change to address the determinants and drivers that shape people's financial circumstances and health. The research products developed to date are actively being used by governments and non-governmental organizations across Canada and internationally to guide the development and improvement of programs and policies to support financial wellbeing for all.

**This is real world impact.**

## Centre for Healthy Communities Financial Wellbeing Program of Research: Timeline



\*Content denoted by the asterisks (\*) directly aligns with the 2023-2024 Centre for Healthy Communities annual reporting period.

Over the 2023-2024 period, the Centre for Healthy Communities has published 3 peer-reviewed publications related to this work (adding to 5 previous publications). Of particular note is the publication in the *American Journal of Public Health* that draws attention to financial wellbeing as a public health issue that needs to be addressed [1].

[1] Publication reference: Nykiforuk CIJ, Belon AP, Allen Scott LK. Untangling concepts of financial circumstances for public health professionals and scholars: a glossary and concept map. *Am J Public Health*. 2024;114(1):78-89. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2023.307449>

# Research Development Activity Highlights from 2023-2024

Here are some highlights of Centre for Healthy Communities' research in 2023-2024 where the results or ongoing work **directly** impact communities on timely practice-identified issues.

- Providing evidence-informed recommendations for action to guide Alberta Health Services programming and policy decisions to support the prevention of vaping behaviours among youth.

"A prioritized list of 5 effective prevention strategies to prevent the initiation of youth vaping that are actionable by the organization (Alberta Health Services) will be extrapolated and incorporated into operational planning, and a knowledge translation product (e.g., infographic) will be developed and shared with collaborating partners within the organization."

Michelle Nummi

Program Manager, Tobacco, Vaping & Cannabis Program

Alberta Health Services

- Leading the dialogue on water reuse in Alberta through the development of a community of practice on the topic. The current conversations and engagement will be critical for helping to shape future directions for water reuse in the province of Alberta in the face of droughts and climate change [2].
- Utilizing Alberta Healthy School Community Wellness Fund data to share and build on stories of success around promoting comprehensive school health in Alberta [3].

"Working with Centre for Healthy Communities has given me the exciting opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary work, with diverse partners (beyond academia), that impacts real world settings and significant social issues, including health inequities and sustainability. I feel fortunate to continue developing as a scholar and researcher while contributing within a collaborative environment."

Miho Lowan-Trudeau

Postdoctoral Fellow, Centre for Healthy Communities

**New research coming soon:** Over the next few years, watch for the results from new research being led by Dr. Roman Pabayo (Centre for Healthy Communities Health Equity Research Thematic Area Lead). Dr. Pabayo was funded in 2024 by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to explore how Canada's electoral system is a contributor to social inequities and the potential impact on population health and health equity. The Centre for Healthy Communities is excited to be part of this project.

[2] The Centre for Healthy Communities 2024 Innovation Forum will be focused on the topic of *water reuse and climate resiliency* to align with this work.

[3] Alberta Healthy School Community Wellness Fund was housed at the Centre for Healthy Communities (2017-2020) and funded by the Government of Alberta (2007-2020).

# Transformation through Engagement and Enhancing Use of Knowledge

Providing a range of engagement opportunities for connection, relationship building, collaboration, and sharing of knowledge and experience is core to our work. Through these opportunities, a variety of stakeholders are engaged that represent different voices and perspectives on timely healthy community issues. This diversity is critical to inspire, inform, and transform how we all come together to enhance communities' ability to use knowledge to generate action to achieve their healthiest potential.

Engagement and enhancing use of knowledge activities led by the Centre for Healthy Communities transforms the healthy communities landscape by:

- Directly informing policy and programs at local to national levels
- Building capacity within practice to use knowledge to generate action
- Bringing together people with common interests from across sectors to build a network



Highlights of Centre for Healthy Communities 2023-2024 engagement and knowledge-to-action activities:

- 3 commissioned evidence-based reports to inform policy and practice
- Over 65 meetings with community partners to share knowledge, learn from different experiences, and build relationships
- 18 Scientist, 26 Practice Affiliate, and 5 Research Affiliate members engaged to contribute to the Centre for Healthy Communities' growth, reputation, and research leadership
- Over 430 attendees from approximately 10 different sectors participated across 4 events led by the Centre for Healthy Communities
- Approximately 700 people in the Centre for Healthy Communities are learning about our initiatives in a Stay-in-the-Know network

**Impact of these activities: Creating engagement opportunities that build capacity for stakeholders to take action, influencing policy and practice locally to internationally.**

# Centre for Healthy Communities - Innovation Forum 2023

The Innovation Forum is one of the Centre for Healthy Communities' signature events. It is aligned with the Centre for Healthy Communities' ethos of working with intersectoral partners to address the complex issues that impact community health, wellbeing, and sustainability. Each year we explore a new and timely topic related to healthy communities.

Innovation Forum Impact: Fostering connections to promote and sustain healthy communities.

81% of post-event evaluation respondents planned to follow-up with new connections made at the Innovation Forum. Of those, 52% intended to connect with 1-2 people, and 29% planned to reach out to 3-4 people.

## **2023 Topic: Community Safety and Wellbeing Policies in Alberta's Communities: An Interactive Knowledge Sharing, Idea Generation, and Networking Event**

Hosted in Partnership with: Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Real Estate Foundation, the Canadian Cancer Society, and the National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy

Throughout the day 138 participants were engaged from 10 different sectors (e.g., Indigenous Elders/communities, industry, non-governmental organizations, municipal government, health, post-secondary). Community Marketplace Conversations allowed participants to engage in visionary conversations, share their experiences, and meet others interested in and working on discussion topics.

Example topics from the 16 conversations:

- Community safety and wellbeing with a focus on unstable housing and equity from a public health perspective
- Municipal collaboration for community safety and wellbeing
- Municipal wellbeing and sustainability policies in the context of climate change
- Public health and wellbeing policies: what role for communities?

**Highlights from the Centre for Healthy Communities 2023 Innovation Forum are available in the [short report](#).**

"Yesterday's Innovation Forum was the best virtual Forum I have attended to-date! The program was well organized, with a dynamic mix of panellists and facilitators. I particularly appreciated the diverse participant perspectives."

Sharlene Wolbeck Minke

Owner and Director, SWM Consulting Services Inc.

Centre for Healthy Communities Practice Affiliate

# Café Scientifique: Driving Multi-Level Action to Improve Financial Wellbeing

The Café Scientifique was a national community event that engaged over 95 stakeholders representing the general public, researchers, decision-makers, practitioners, industry, and organizational partners. The sharing and dialogue at the event focused on increasing awareness about how financial wellbeing impacts health, and how now is the time to work together to take action on the root causes of poor financial wellbeing.

**Highlights from the Café Scientifique are available in the [short report](#).**

Funded by: Canadian Institutes of Health Research

Café Scientifique Impact: Sharing of evidence-based knowledge to build capacity and inform the development of policy and programs at local to national levels to support financial wellbeing.



92% of post-event evaluation respondents were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the Café Scientifique.

“This is a great space to make connections with individuals from other organizations! I believe the Centre for Healthy Communities plays a critical role in bridging these connections.”

Café Scientifique, Participant Comment [4]

“The Centre for Healthy Communities *Café Scientifique: Driving Multi-Level Action to Improve Financial Wellbeing* brought together diverse voices, each contributing unique experiences and insights into the importance of driving action for financial wellbeing. The personal stories shared highlight the significance of bringing multiple sectors together to address complex health challenges and to foster collective action. It was inspiring to see so many individuals around the table, united in their commitment to create positive change through practical actions and advocacy efforts.”

Fatima Jorge

Manager Healthy Places, Alberta Health Services

[4] Participant comments are from the Café Scientifique post-event evaluation form. People’s names are not collected to protect anonymity.



## Healthy Communities Conversation

The Healthy Communities Conversation is part of a regular series hosted by the Centre for Healthy Communities that is meant to spark insights and ideas about a critical topic facing diverse communities. As the name describes, these events are not research presentations, but rather conversations between various stakeholders on the topic of interest.

The 2023-2024 Healthy Communities Conversation focused on *Strengthening Health Promotion Capacity Among Indigenous Communities*. Over 100 people participated in this conversation.

Healthy Communities Conversation Impact: Provided an opportunity for open-ended dialogue between researchers and practitioners, while strengthening the network of research and practice partners working on this topic.

Read the [highlights](#) from the *Strengthening Health Promotion Capacity Among Indigenous Communities* conversation.

“Very enjoyable experience with no formal outcomes expected in the webinar. We need some of these open-ended opportunities to explore. Great job!”

Healthy Communities Conversation, Participant Comment [5]

[5] Participant comments are from the Healthy Communities Conversation post-event evaluation form. People’s names are not collected to protect anonymity.

# Webinar and Panel Discussion: Health Benefits, Strategies, and Examples to Help Strengthen Social Cohesion in Alberta

Trust is an essential element in social transformation and in healthy communities. The level of trust and connectedness within a community is referred to as social cohesion. This webinar and panel presentation showcased new resources developed by the Centre for Healthy Communities that profile strategies, health benefits, and examples of how to strengthen social cohesion in communities. These practical resources were co-developed by a team of Centre for Healthy Communities Practice Affiliate members, Scientist members, and a School of Public Health Masters student.

Social Cohesion Resources Impact: These evidence and practice-based tools are directly being applied to inform policies and programs within Alberta to build social cohesion.



91% of post-event evaluation respondents rated their overall experience as good or excellent.

“Led by Luc Sauze (School of Public Health Graduate Student), Sharlene Wolbeck Minke (Centre for Healthy Communities Practice Affiliate), and myself, along with other Centre for Healthy Communities members who work in social and health equity, the most up to date knowledge and science on the health benefits of social cohesion were gathered. This allowed Luc Sauze, to gain valuable experience in not only compiling the knowledge and synthesizing it in a formal report and community tool, but to also engage with the community to successfully complete a public health project.”

Dr. Roman Pabayo

Centre for Healthy Communities Health Equity Research Thematic Area Lead  
Associate Professor, School of Public Health, University of Alberta

“Review of a seniors centre program evaluation from the lens of the Social Cohesion framework (using the resources developed by the Centre for Healthy Communities) indicated that it is not programs and services alone that support healthy living. Rather, it is when synergy is created between people, place, and programs that seniors feel connected, included, embrace diversity, and have a shared feeling of trust and respect. The resources provided the Board with a practical approach to understand what social cohesion is, its health benefits, and strategies for future work.”

Birgitta Larsson

BIM Larsson & Associates  
Centre for Healthy Communities Practice Affiliate

# Thank You

The Centre for Healthy Communities would like to express our gratitude to our Practice and Scientific Advisory Committee for their strategic advice and guidance throughout the year. In addition, we appreciate the active engagement of our Executive Committee and Membership – we value the experience and knowledge that you bring to the work we do together. Finally, we thank our Centre for Healthy Communities staff and trainees who are integral to supporting the day-to-day work. Their work is essential to the range of projects that we are engaged in and to the standards of excellence to which the Centre for Healthy Communities prides itself on.

"I think what I like the most about being on the Practice and Scientific Advisory Committee is that it's a space where perspectives overlap in a special if not unique way. It's great to see what starts to form in the middle when different ways of knowing intersect: academic expertise, practitioner knowledge, and community wisdom all coming together to create a collective understanding more meaningful than any perspective alone. To be honest, I think that's fundamentally what is needed for "Healthy Communities" – it's just not possible without a holistic understanding of what that means."

Giri Puligandla

Executive Director, Canadian Mental Health Association - Edmonton Region  
Centre for Healthy Communities Practice and Scientific Advisory Committee Member

"Participating in the Innovation Forum and other meetings during the 2023-2024 year hosted by the Centre for Healthy Communities provided me with inspiration as my team and I develop innovative initiatives to reduce risk of cancer and chronic disease and improve health equity in Alberta. In addition, meetings and membership in the Centre for Healthy Communities has increased my connections with partners and other researchers."

Christina Gillies

Scientist (Healthy Communities), Provincial Population and Public Health, Alberta Health Services  
Adjunct Professor, School of Public Health, University of Alberta  
Centre for Healthy Communities Scientist

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