

Northern Health Position on the Environment as a Context for Health

Northern Health wants to improve quality of life by promoting the understanding that the health and well-being of populations depends on healthy environments. This will be achieved by working with individuals, organizations and community partners to support and promote efforts to:

- Promote a fundamental shift from protection to safe and healthy environments.
- Support social and environmental developments as important contexts for health.
- Develop integrated settings approaches to support interaction and connections among the settings for health (where people live, work, learn and play).
- Engage in new partnerships with non-traditional partners to achieve these goals.

Understanding the Environment as a Context for Health

Human health cannot be considered in isolation. It depends highly on the quality of environment in which people live: for people to be healthy, they need healthy environments.

- Lebel 2003

The health and well-being of current and future populations depends on healthy environments.

- **Conversations** about the environment often **remain isolated** from conversations about health and community.
- We tend to overlook inter-relationships among health, socio-economic **and** environmental factors.
- One way of understanding the interrelationships between health, ecosystems and society is through the field of **ecohealth**.
- Words beginning with **eco** (economy, ecosystem and ecohealth) all have origins in the Greek word for **house** (oikos) and the Latin word for **household** (oeco).

Healthy Settings

The majority of work on healthy settings has focused on **urban and built environments**. Less attention has been paid to the natural environment and the **landscapes and ecosystems** on which cities and economies depend. Considering the environment as a context for health allows us to see that all healthy settings **are embedded in the environment** and **highlights connections** among different settings in which we **live, learn, work and play**.

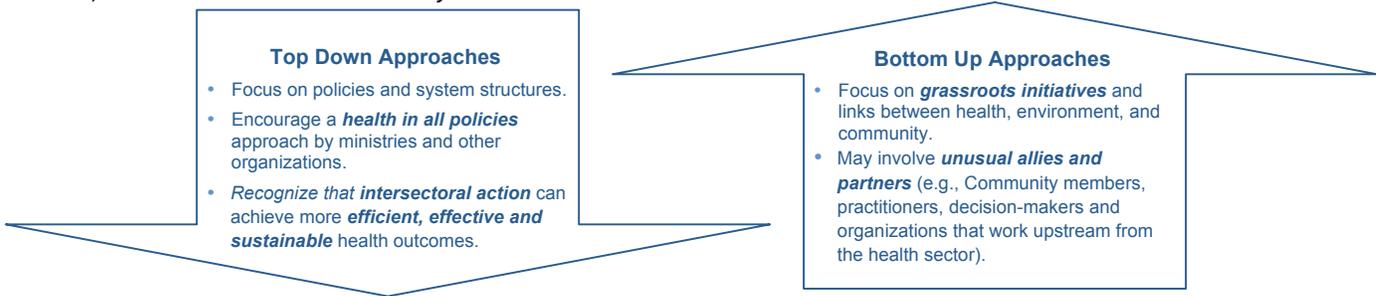
For further information, please refer to the complete **Northern Health Position on the Environment as a Context for Health** available on the Northern Health web site: www.northernhealth.ca (About Us/Position Statements/Addressing Risk Factors), or by using the following address: <http://www.northernhealth.ca/AboutUs/PositionStatements.aspx>

Northern Environments and Health

Physical geography plays an important role as a context for health in Northern BC. Economic, social, and cultural development are all influenced by the physical environment. The northern economy is closely tied to natural resource extraction. Fluctuations in global demand for resources leads to booming and waning cycles that can threaten the viability, sustainability, health and well-being of these developments.

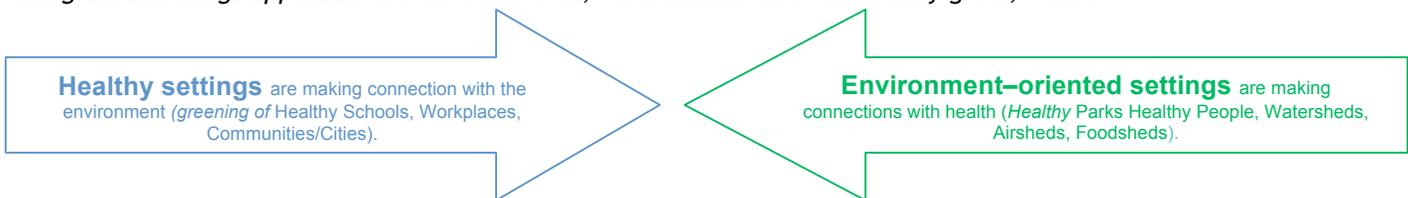
Approaches to Link Health, Environment and Community

The links between social and physical environments in Northern BC highlight the importance of understanding the linkages between health, environment and community and the need for different sectors, disciplines and organizations to work together. Both *top-down* and *bottom-up* approaches can be used to effectively integrate understandings of health, environment and community.



Integrating Healthy Settings:

Settings-based approaches encourage **intersectoral collaboration**. Northern Health already demonstrates the value of healthy settings approaches, including the [Position on Healthy Communities](#) and other work focused on fostering healthy places to live, work, learn and play. Attention to the environment as a context for health creates a base for an *integrated settings approach* that meets health, environment and community goals, where:



The links among health, environment and community create an interface between green and health settings

