Chapter 1 Comprehensive School Health

Defining health

This chapter explores the foundations of health and well-being, and explains the framework of comprehensive school health. This basic information provides a solid foundation for implementing and maintaining the CALM program of studies.

Determinants of health

Determinants of health are those factors that create and maintain health, not only individual health but also community health. Current literature identifies the following factors: human biology, lifestyle, environment, and availability of health services.

A broader view of these comprehensive health determinants includes:

- peace
- shelter
- education
- food
- income
- a stable ecosystem
- sustainable resources
- social justice
- equity.

The following is another list of factors that may affect health.

**Biology and genetic endowment:** The genes inherited from birth parents form one’s physiological make-up, which impacts greatly on an individual’s health.

**Childhood development:** The future health of a child is affected by the quality of prenatal care and early childhood experiences.

**Available health services:** The preventative and primary care services offered in a community affect the health of its members.

**Physical environment:** Housing, safety, the quality of water and air in the community, and other environmental factors, known and unknown, have a major impact on health.

**Access to education:** This includes access to, and degree of success at, education. People with a good education have the knowledge and skills needed to be contributing members of their community as well as increased opportunities to be employed.
Basic health literacy: Health literacy is the capacity to access, interpret and apply health information and services to make healthy choices. It differs from general education as one can be health literate without substantial formal education.

Employment and working conditions: Meaningful employment and a stable income along with a healthy work environment contribute to health. Working conditions also impact health.

Income and social status: The general health of a community is not necessarily dependent on its total wealth. However, a community’s health is closely related to the relative distribution of that wealth. A community with a greater proportion of people in poverty has a lower health status.

Personal health practices and coping skills: People who develop and use their coping skills are self-reliant and better able to solve problems and make positive choices that enhance their health. Their personal health actions and behaviours lead to good self-care and better disease protection.

Social support networks: People are better able to deal with difficult situations and maintain a greater sense of control when there is support from families, friends and the community.

Dimensions of health
There are a number of dimensions of health that provide the basic framework of the CALM Program of Studies: emotional/psychological, intellectual, social, spiritual and physical. Well-being stems from having these dimensions of one’s life in harmony with each other. The degree of well-being in each of these dimensions, as well as how these dimensions interact, affect a person’s overall well-being.

Emotional/psychological well-being: People’s personal thoughts and feelings, and the behaviours related to these, reflect personal emotional/psychological well-being. Important influences include self-image (the way people see themselves), self-esteem (how people feel about what they see), what people choose to do about what they see and feel, and the respect they have for themselves in relationships.

Intellectual well-being: How people think and learn, the information they gather, and how they use that information, reflect intellectual well-being. It is influenced by what people know and want to know about themselves, all the other information they know and want to learn, their self-confidence related to learning activities, how they choose to learn more, how they use the things they learn, and how they apply information to making decisions and choices.
Social well-being: The ways people relate to others reflect their social well-being. It is influenced by many factors, including how they are treated by others, how they interpret that treatment, how they relate to others, how they communicate, and how they establish and maintain relationships.

Spiritual well-being: Spiritual well-being is an important influence on personal choices and decisions. Beliefs, how people act upon them, and personal ethics are integral to total personal well-being.

Physical well-being: This dimension includes the actual make-up of the body, how it works, and how it is treated by oneself and others.

Environmental well-being, societal well-being and cultural well-being are other dimensions of personal well-being.

Health literacy

CALM is the core program for health literacy at the senior high school level. CALM provides opportunities for students to develop health literacy, which includes the key components of critical thinking, effective communication, self-directed learning and responsible citizenship.

Health literacy is the degree to which people can obtain, process and understand the basic health information and services they need to make appropriate health decisions. It is “a person’s ability to understand and use health-related information—things that people commonly encounter in the health-care setting—such as reading an appointment slip, interpreting prescription information, or understanding recommendations for self-care.”

But it is more than this. For example, basic health literacy is the ability to read directions on a pill bottle, understand the prescription and follow directions to improve one’s health. More developed literacy is being able to initiate contact with health-care providers, take actions such as making appointments, and being willing and able to work with health-care providers toward a goal for increased personal well-being. Highly developed health literacy leads to choosing actions that improve health conditions or situations for others as well as for oneself.

Health literacy is key to using the health-care system wisely. Health care is a mutual responsibility, and individuals are being asked to assume greater responsibility for self-care. People need to be able to understand information, explanations and instructions from health-care providers and take the initiative to ask questions and request clarification so they can make effective and appropriate health-related decisions.
Comprehensive school health

Building commitment
An important principle for Alberta Learning is that of collaboration. Collaboration means working with partners and stakeholders to foster lifelong learning. The comprehensive school health model is an excellent example of collaboration among schools, communities and families.

In order to implement a successful comprehensive school health approach, educators need a solid understanding of the approach, its philosophy and how it can work in the classroom.

- Comprehensive school health teachers need to support comprehensive school health issues in the classroom, school and community.
- Comprehensive school health teachers must be able to identify learning opportunities in the classroom, school and community, and know how they fit into comprehensive school health. Teachers need to champion the cause of comprehensive school health and bring others on board.

Strategies for a comprehensive school health approach
Comprehensive school health is a broad spectrum of programs, policies, activities and services that take place in schools and communities in order to enable children and youth to enhance their health, develop to their fullest potential, and establish productive and satisfying relationships in their present and future lives.

The goals of a comprehensive approach are to:
- promote health and wellness
- prevent specific diseases, disorders and injuries
- intervene to assist children and youth who are in need or at risk
- help support those who are already experiencing poor health.

There are four major strategies to reach these goals—instruction, preventative health services, social support and healthy physical environments.

Instruction includes:
- a comprehensive health education curriculum
- a comprehensive physical education curriculum
- the integration of health instruction into subject areas
- formal and informal learning
- the development of decision-making skills
- effective preservice and inservice training for teachers
- adequate learning and teaching materials
- appropriate teaching methodologies.
Preventative health services include:
- appraisals
- screening services
- early identification
- child protection services
- referrals
- guidance services
- counselling
- services for students with special needs
- treatment
- rehabilitation
- post-treatment support
- preservice and inservice training of health and other professionals
- active coordination of services and programs.

Social support includes:
- role-modelling by school staff and others
- peer support
- public policy that supports health
- media involvement
- community participation
- staff wellness programs
- appropriate school discipline policies
- effective school management practices
- active student participation
- extensive involvement of parents.

Healthy physical environment includes:
- safety procedures and regulations
- sanitation, clean water
- hygiene standards
- environmental health standards
- healthy food services
- smoke-free school policies.

Building collaboration
CALM is part of a larger framework of strategies and activities that support comprehensive school health. However, to achieve overall health goals for students, schools need to provide curriculum connections beyond the school to the wider community.

This involves establishing collaborative partnerships among students, parents, educators, health-care professionals and other community members to address social and environmental factors that determine optimal health.
Collaboration among schools, parents and communities is a central tenet of comprehensive health education. Parental involvement is an integral component, since the family is the primary educator in the development of student attitudes and values. Activities and processes in CALM encourage family interest and involvement in student learning. The wider community plays a supportive and complementary role in building on student attitudes and values.

Strong links among schools, school councils, regional health authorities and other community-based agencies and organizations facilitate coordinated planning and mutual support of efforts that promote lifelong learning and well-being. The CALM program encourages and fosters these connections and collaborations.

The comprehensive school health approach recognizes that schools are part of the greater community and that learning happens in and beyond the school environment. It acknowledges that much of what is learned is affected by influences outside the classroom, and that the likelihood of students adopting and maintaining healthy behaviours increases when messages from multiple sources are consistent.

CALM teachers can be the impetus for many activities, ranging from addressing cross-programming issues to initiating the implementation of a comprehensive school health approach in the community. CALM teachers are in a position to support and promote a comprehensive school health approach.

Innovations such as comprehensive school health are usually championed by one or more visionary individuals. Champions may be education or health professionals within the system, informed parents or community stakeholders. While champions may reside outside the education and health sectors, having champions connected to both education and health increases the likelihood for success. Regardless, champions share common attributes including having a clear purpose, influence, receptivity to new approaches, and a passion that inspires support.

The benefit of promoting a comprehensive school health approach with parents and community members is that home, school and community can work together to meet the specific needs of a school. The approach will look different in each school because the needs, issues and concerns of students and their families vary from school to school and from community to community.