

# School Health Promotion in Prince Edward Island (PEI)

## Prince Edward Island in Profile

[Prince Edward Island \(PEI\)](#) is the smallest province in Canada. It consists of 5,560 square kilometers of land in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, on Canada's East coast. PEI is separated from mainland Canada – New Brunswick and Nova Scotia – by the Northumberland Strait. PEI was discovered by Jacques Cartier in 1534, when it was occupied by the Mi'kmaq. In 2013, Prince Edward Island's [population](#) was estimated to be 145,273. The Island is known as the 'cradle of Confederation' because its capital was the site of one of Canada's most historical events, the 1864 [Charlottetown Conference](#), held to discuss a Canadian Union.

There are 20,340 students attending 65 schools, of which two are private. The public system consists of two school boards – the [English Language School Board](#), which operates 57 schools, and [La Commission scolaire de langue française](#), which operates six schools.

[Health PEI](#) is responsible for the delivery of programs and services within the five rural community hospitals, as well as the province's largest facilities, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Prince County Hospital, and Hillsborough Hospital – which are provincial in scope.

Public health services are centralized and managed by the [Department of Health and Wellness](#). Within that Department, the [Division of Sport, Recreation, and Healthy Living](#) is a key partner in the area of promoting student health and wellness within the school setting.

[Interested parties](#) engaged in promoting student health and wellness within the school setting include students, teachers, parents, provincial alliances, community groups, and other provincial departments. Parents are involved in schools through a combination of [Home and School Associations](#) and Parent Councils. These voluntary bodies have an advisory role in the matter of school operations, including school-based nutrition, social and health services, and through their involvement in school development planning.

## Background

School health promotion on PEI focuses on healthy eating, tobacco/alcohol/drug reduction, physical activity, emotional and social well-being, and leadership. Since 2006, the *School Health Specialist* of the [Department of Education and Early Childhood Development](#) has provided individualized support to schools, as well as provincial coordination of programs, policies, and services to support student health and wellness.

The School Health Specialist reports to the Director of Corporate Services. Although there is no formal agreement, there is a long history of collaboration with the Department of Health and Wellness, particularly with staff of the Division of Sport, Recreation, and Healthy Living. An agreement between the Department of Health and Wellness and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development acknowledges that the School Health Specialist represents both Departments on the Joint Consortium for School Health. Departmental colleagues meet

frequently in the context of inter-governmental steering committees to work on various health issues in different settings, including schools.

## **School Health Supports**

The [Department of Education and Early Childhood Development](#), the [Department of Health and Wellness](#), the [Comprehensive School Health Research Group](#) at the University of Prince Edward Island, school boards, schools, provincial alliances, community organizations and community volunteers have been working together to support the health and well-being of Island students. Using the [Comprehensive School Health framework](#), collective efforts have resulted in a variety of new and strengthened school health initiatives, which support positive health behaviours and contribute to enhanced student success.

### Teaching and Learning

Provincial curriculum and a variety of resources and activities have been developed to support students in gaining the knowledge, experience, and skills needed to improve their health and well-being. Formal education in health, physical education, family life, home economics, and career opportunities provide students with information and skills which will encourage healthy behaviours that last a lifetime.

### Healthy School Policies

Policies help to promote health and well-being and to shape a respectful, welcoming and caring school environment. A variety of healthy school policies exist to support the health and well-being of students, such as the prevention of bullying, harassment, and discrimination, tobacco/alcohol/drug use ban, school nutrition, and others to support a healthy, safe, and caring environment.

### Programs, Partnerships and Services

Partnerships are defined by the many connections between the school, the students' families, and the school community. These include supportive working relationships within schools (staff and students), between schools, and between schools and other community organizations. This also is reflected in health, education and other departments working together to advance school health, as well as the many community and schools-based services that support and promote student and staff health and well-being. A variety of partnerships and services support the health and well-being of students at the school, provincial and national levels.

### Social and Physical Environment

The social environment includes the quality of relationships among and between staff and students in the school, and the emotional well-being of students. This can be strongly influenced by relationships with families and the wider community. A variety of programs, services, and curricula are offered within the school to help develop strong relationship within schools. The physical environment includes the buildings, grounds, play space, and equipment in and surrounding the school, as well as the basic amenities such as sanitation and air cleanliness. Students also have a wide variety of opportunities

to get involved with in-school councils, clubs, and committees, as well as a variety of local, regional and national personal growth and leadership opportunities.

### [School Health Research](#)

A variety of school / student health research projects are conducted within schools to help monitor and explore the health behaviours of Island students. The results of this research helps to build and expand upon the knowledge base regarding student health behaviours on PEI which can then be used to develop and support a variety of health promoting policies, programs, and initiatives.

### **Recent Developments:**

Recent developments regarding provincial programs and initiatives which provide support and services to all schools at the curriculum, policy, programs, and partnership levels, include:

- In partnership with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Health and Wellness, and the University of Prince Edward Island, the 2012-13 School Health Action Planning and Evaluation System / Youth Smoking Survey (SHAPES/YSS) - [Provincial Student Health Profile](#) was released on February 10, 2014. This report reflects a provincial summary of the health behaviours (healthy eating, active living, mental fitness, substance use) of approximately 8,500 students who were surveyed in 2012-13. The [provincial launch of this report](#), attended by over 60 people, provided an opportunity to share provincial summaries of students' lifestyle habits, a comparison of survey results between 2008-09, 2010-11, and 2012-13, as well as how school, school boards, provincial organizations and volunteers are helping to address various needs, which have been identified through this report.
- In 2013-14, we have implemented a SHAPES/YSS Partner Engagement Strategy, through an on-going partnership with the Department of Health and Wellness and the Comprehensive School Health Research Group at the University of Prince Edward Island. Through the SHAPES/YSS system, schools, school boards, and provincial health profile reports have been created from the 2012-2013 student health behaviour surveys. Individualized presentations were made to a variety of schools, school boards, student classrooms, parent associations, and provincial departments regarding the findings from these reports. This approach has encouraged and supported the use of SHAPES/YSS data to help inform various programs, policies, and learning outcomes. These presentations have also provided an opportunity for conversations with students and parents regarding their impressions and responses to the data collected.
- The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has researched, developed, and are piloting a new Grade 10 physical education /wellness curriculum and supporting resources. The new grade 10 curriculum builds on the K-9 physical education and health curriculums, and aims to develop confident and competent students who understand, appreciate, and engage in a balanced, healthy, active lifestyle. Throughout the grade 10 physical/wellness education curriculum, opportunities are provided for students to attain and maintain a healthy mind, body and spirit. Students will explore how the physical, social,

psychological, spiritual, and environmental dimensions are interconnected and interdependent with each other and how these dimensions should be maintained or improved upon to enhance one's quality of life.

- We have continued to support the expansion of school based breakfast/snack programs in partnership with the Department of Health and Wellness and the PEI Healthy Eating Alliance (HEA). Since 2008, 24 new programs have been created within various schools and alternative education sites across the province. At the start of the 2013-14 school year, a total of 48 programs were providing food to approximately 6,000 students and being supported by approximately 600 volunteers. Breakfast program evaluation results continue to be shared with program organizers and workshops were hosted for breakfast program volunteers/organizers. The focus of these workshops was to educate programs about results of the evaluation report, school nutrition policy, food safety, volunteer management, keys to success, and school success sharing. School breakfast/snack programs help to encourage healthy eating, to ensure that more students come to class prepared to learn, and they support nutrition habits which positively impact student achievement.
- We have continued to distribute funding, through the School Health Grant (SHG), to school based health and wellness projects. Through this grant, students, teachers, parents, and community members are encouraged to examine the results of their SHAPES/YSS school level health profile reports, complete the Healthy School Planner Foundational Module, discuss and identify needs and priorities, propose activities to address these needs within a comprehensive school health framework, and develop an action and evaluation plan. Projects this year include whole school physical activity events, healthy snack programs, resources for student/staff 'fitness' rooms, self-esteem, healthy eating, and physical activity initiatives for girls, as well as leadership and anti-bullying activities. The SHG is funded in part by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Health and Wellness, and Go!PEI. Since 2009, the SHG has provided funding to 96 different school and school community projects.

### **Challenges and Successes**

PEI is a small province with few resources for which school health promotion is but one of many competing priorities. A push to academic achievement challenges proponents of 'school health' to demonstrate how it can be an effective mechanism to help improve student success and academic achievement. At the same time, we have been very successful in using the comprehensive school health framework, supported by a variety of community and provincial partners, to support schools in moving school-based health and wellness initiatives forward. Led by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and supported by the Department of Health and Wellness, provincial alliances (Healthy Eating Alliance / Recreation PEI), as well as community groups, students, and parent volunteers, we continue to support schools and school communities to address their identified priorities.

## **Benefits to JCSH Membership**

The Joint Consortium for School Health was created by the *Council of Ministers of Education, Canada* (CMEC) and the *Conference of F/P/T Deputy Ministers of Health* (CDMH), through a joint proposal put forward by BC and PEI. Decision-makers in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Health and Wellness saw the need for collaboration between the education and health sectors. They recognized the opportunity that the Consortium provided to take a holistic view of the health of students and pursue the link between health and student achievement. Following the first mandate of the JCSH (2005-2010), PEI has taken over responsibility as the lead province and now houses the Secretariat staff, and provides leadership at the Management Committee and School Health Coordinator Committee levels.

PEI benefits from Joint Consortium Membership through:

- the ability to share knowledge, experience, and expertise across the country in relation to School Health and other related matters;
- the ability to highlight the collaborative efforts existing on PEI which promote health and well-being within homes, communities, and schools as settings;
- the support of existing, and future, partnerships between Government Departments, and among Government Departments, Provincial Alliances, and community groups;
- the national efforts regarding school health data collection which will support jurisdictional efforts to explore data collection, structures, and opportunities.

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