



Institute of Population and Public Health  
**Applied Public Health Chair**  
Impact Case Study



**Dr. Kim Raine**  
**Building healthier communities**



**Research Focus**

Building a healthy community means enabling and encouraging the people who live there to make healthy choices. Such choices only exist, however, if they are affordable and accessible.

Physical, economic, social, and political inequalities and barriers in a community—such as an absence of safe pathways and bike lanes or a lack of jobs—can force people to make unhealthy decisions. Taking action to change these environments is essential to creating a culture that supports healthy living.

To identify practices and procedures that could help make communities healthier, Applied Public Health Chair Dr. Kim Raine and her team assessed a number of initiatives launched through the Healthy Alberta Communities (HAC) project to determine their impact on building capacity and enhancing environments.

The results of their work have not only provided timely evidence to inform policy, practice, and research decisions, but were also used to create an interactive on-line multimedia tool for use by health promotion practitioners, community organizations, and community champions.

This interactive tool, called *How to Create a Healthy Community: A Resource for Capacity Building in Health Promotion*, has two components, both designed to give people more control over their own health. The first is an assessment tool to help individuals understand the overall health of their communities and the second is a model for capacity building in health promotion that provides steps, insights, tips, and tools for improving the health of communities.

By using their research to identify best practices that can be applied on the ground and at many different levels of “community”—from geographic communities to those that are organizational or social—Dr. Raine and her team are translating knowledge into practice in Alberta and elsewhere.

**Research Impact: Making a Difference**

Affiliated with the Centre for Health Promotion Studies in the University of Alberta’s School of Public Health, HAC is a community-driven initiative aimed at reducing risk factors for the development of chronic



diseases. The goal of the project is to make healthy choices easy in the day-to-day lives of people living in four communities: Bonnyville, St. Paul, Norwood/North Central Edmonton, and Medicine Hat.

HAC launched in 2004 with funding from Alberta Health and Wellness, which committed \$3 million over five years to the project to develop and implement sustainable, collaborative partnerships to improve the health of communities. While the partnerships ranged from community gardens to coalitions for active transportation, they all encouraged communities to participate in setting their own direction by capturing the experience and expertise of citizens, community agencies, and elected leaders.

The Chair's role in the effort was to help gather and use evidence on the impact of the initiatives to influence values, change environments, and create a culture supportive of healthy living. Dr. Raine and her team carried out the evidence-gathering aspect of their work by using validated assessment tools to document the levels and nature of community capacity built and also documented changes in community environments. Further, a case-study approach was used to examine the process of capacity building as experienced by coordinators working in community-based chronic disease prevention.

Many of the initiatives launched with HAC funding are still operating under community leadership. The sustainability of these projects led to the development of the on-line resource, which is aimed at helping other communities develop their own unique, community-based health promotion interventions.

The HAC model is being integrated into standard practice for community-level health promotion throughout Alberta Health Services. Lessons learned through the project have also provided the impetus for the Alberta Policy Coalition for Cancer Prevention, another community-academic-government partnership aimed at addressing policy change for chronic disease prevention, and will likely have an impact on population health in other parts of the country as well.

## Want to Know More?

For more information, visit the Healthy Alberta Communities website at <http://healthyalbertacommunities.com/hac-model-resource-intro.html>.

Dr. Kim Raine is the CIHR/PHAC and Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada Applied Public Health Chair in Environmental and Population-based Strategies for Chronic Disease Prevention and the Promotion of Healthy Weights

Chair Contact Information  
kim.raine@ualberta.ca