



**TOP 3 IN 10:
TAKING BACK
NEW BRUNSWICK'S
HEALTH**

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



“Let food be thy medicine
and medicine be thy food.”
- Hippocrates

In September 2016, the New Brunswick Medical Society launched a major new initiative. Known as Top 3 in 10, the title reflects the ambition of the project: What if, by acting now, New Brunswick was one of the top 3 healthiest Canadian provinces in 10 years? We put out a call for everyday New Brunswickers to tell us what barriers they face that keep them from being as healthy as possible.

We launched the project with an inspirational video calling on New Brunswickers to share their ideas about how to make the province healthier. Featuring a cyclist wearing an iconic New Brunswick flag jersey and travelling through scenic locations throughout the province, the video has become a symbol of the campaign's message of hope and opportunity. Since the launch, the video has been viewed around 200,000 times and brought in over 1,000 suggestions from New Brunswickers around the province.

The ideas we're hearing are innovative and could have a direct impact on the overall health of the province. By listening to and working with New Brunswickers we are using a common-sense approach and championing simple solutions to remove systemic barriers.

In this report, you will learn about some of the key suggestions we've received – straight from New Brunswickers. Things like better food, activity and health education in New Brunswick schools, better active transportation, and helping to make a healthy lifestyle more affordable are among the suggestions we received most often.

The goal we have set for ourselves is not an easy one. However, as we've seen since we first began this project, New Brunswickers are keenly aware of just what is preventing them from being as healthy as they could be. What's more, the response we've received shows the significant interest in making this province healthier.

We're a fairly community-minded bunch here in New Brunswick. We take great pride in our towns and in our province. We have a reputation throughout the country for being friendly and always willing to lend a hand. This time, we're calling on the Province to lend us a hand: Make it easier for us to be healthy. The question isn't whether we need to act, but how.

We need real concrete changes, and targets along the way so we can check our progress. This report, driven by suggestions from New Brunswickers, will guide our efforts to make New Brunswick one of the top three healthiest provinces in 10 years.

Let's make the healthy choice the easy choice, for all of us.

Dr. Lynn Murphy-Kaulbeck, MD, MSC, FRCSC
President, New Brunswick Medical Society



WHY TOP 3 IN 10?

It took us decades to become one of Canada's unhealthiest provinces. It will likely take a number of years to become a national leader. Recognizing that provinces like British Columbia have both a supportive culture and supportive government policies, we want to aim for a top three finish in ten years. To achieve this goal, we need to start now.

For most suggestions made by New Brunswickers, doctors are suggesting concrete measurements to assess whether or not we're making progress. A goal without a plan is just a wish – and a real goal needs a plan with dates and targets.

Almost every form of measuring success has limitations, and as scientists, we are aware of that. To assess whether or not we've made it to be one of the top three healthiest provinces, we are suggesting we measure dozens of indicators noted in this report. The most basic of them is to measure our body mass index as reported by Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 105-0101.

“Helping educate New Brunswick families in order to live healthier lives is one of the most important opportunities for our province. This is why your government wholeheartedly supports the recent challenge put forth by physicians in our province through the New Brunswick Medical Society to become one of the three healthiest provinces within 10 years.”

2016 Speech from the Throne, November 2, 2016

BACKGROUND

Throughout the years, the New Brunswick Medical Society has endeavoured to improve the health of New Brunswickers. In 2013, the NBMS launched Care First, a health policy document which identified “reducing the size of New Brunswick” as one of its key goals, and provided concrete suggestions for how to do so. Make Menus Matter, in 2013 and 2015, brought attention to school cafeteria offerings. Small Strides, Healthy Lives, the Medical Society’s ongoing children’s running program, provides a free race bib and medal to children participating in sanctioned RunNB races. In 2014, the NBMS launched Prescriptions for Health, which allows physicians to “prescribe” exercise to their patients on specially designed pads.

In September 2016, the NBMS asked government to contribute to its most ambitious project yet. Known as Top 3 in 10, the project aims to make New Brunswick one of the top three healthiest provinces in 10 years.

Top 3 in 10 focuses on community and environmental supports such as walking trails, food preparation education and affordable, nutritious food available for all New Brunswickers. It acknowledges the role that an individual’s surroundings play in influencing their health, as well as the government’s role in creating environments that encourage healthy choices.

The initiative began on September 12 with a Forum on Healthy Weights. At that event, the NBMS launched a video calling on New Brunswickers to share their ideas of what can be done in their communities that would make it easier to be healthy. Following the Forum and video launch, the conversation continued with a photo series sharing the stories of New Brunswickers and the changes they would like to see.

The video quickly became the best-known component of the campaign. It has been viewed around **200,000** times across Facebook and YouTube, in English and French. The photo series has also received a significant amount of attention, with the most successful photo reaching **25,289** people.

A running theme throughout the campaign has been a request for suggestions on how to make New Brunswick communities healthier, and New Brunswickers have enthusiastically responded. Over **1,000** ideas have been submitted, and most of these ideas can be grouped under key themes.

This report details the most commonly received suggestions. It will explain the importance of these suggestions, provide information about the steps for action, and give recommendations. A sampling of the submissions received from the public will also be provided throughout this report.

The most common themes of the suggestions we received were:

- 1. Better food and activity-related education in New Brunswick schools**
- 2. Better access to, and safer, active transportation**
- 3. Making the Province a healthier employer, and Provincial environments healthier**
- 4. Ensuring a healthy lifestyle is more affordable**
- 5. An earmarked tax on sugary drinks for health promotion, or low-income subsidization**
- 6. Access to community and outdoor infrastructure to support activities**
- 7. Altering retail environments**

BETTER FOOD AND ACTIVITY-RELATED EDUCATION IN NEW BRUNSWICK SCHOOLS

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should add mandatory “Home Economics” classes in our curricula through to graduation.

New Brunswickers “of a certain age” will remember the days when home economics classes (cooking and sewing) were mandatory for women, and shop class was mandatory for men. While many people today can get by without knowing how to mend a rip or carve a piece of wood, everyone has to eat. The need to eat nutritious foods every day is universal.

Studies show that the percentage of food consumed outside the home has increased dramatically. Restaurant food has larger portion sizes, and can contain excessive amounts of fat, sugar, and salt to improve taste, as can frozen or prepared foods sold at the store.

The number one suggestion we received from New Brunswickers on how to make our province healthier was for mandatory home economics classes in our school curriculum. These courses can help youth understand how to prepare their own foods. They also provide an understanding of safe food handling, as well as basic nutrition. Armed with some basic preparation techniques, fruits, vegetables, eggs, and meat don't have to be intimidating for young cooks.

“Bring back home economics in school. Teach meal planning, portion sizing for age/weight, proper calorie intake, proper balance of carbs/fats/proteins, balance of healthy choices & indulgences, etc. I didn't learn these things until I paid an educated professional to guide me for 2 years.”
– Jessika, Saint John

Measurement: The number of students in Grades 9-12 who take one of several potential home economics courses on an annual basis, such as “Nutrition for Healthy Living.”

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should enforce Policy 711 to ensure schools are models of healthy eating habits.

School food was a popular topic for suggestions, with many people commenting negatively on the nutrition of the food served in their local school cafeteria. The Department of Education should ensure cafeterias follow the guidelines outlined in Policy 711, which mandates the nutritional content of school food, and not serve pizza, burgers and fries every day. The mixed messaging of teaching the importance of good nutrition inside the classroom while serving junk food outside should not be tolerated.

“Insist that schools offer good, and affordable, food options. It's deplorable and the contracts are NOT being followed (I'm a teacher & a parent & have unsuccessfully fought this fight to no avail).”
– Anonymous, Shediac

Measurement: The number of schools who actively comply with Policy 711, as measured by dietitians who audit schools on a rotating basis.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should add mandatory Physical Education classes in our curricula through to graduation.

Many commenters spoke favorably about increasing the amount of time New Brunswick's students spend in gym class. In fact, physical education is mandatory through to high school graduation in Manitoba. Given the poor level of activity outside school hours, this would go part of the way to ensure children and youth are physically active. Though curricula are busy, and not every school has ideal facilities, we can do better. These classes should be focused not only on the number of hours of physical education, but that the instructors and instruction are focused on **quality** physical education.



“Start with our children. Make schools into healthier environments. Revise the school food policy so fast food type lunches are no longer allowed to be offered as lunches. Make gym class a daily activity in a manner that all kids want to play and be active. All schools should have community gardens to teach kids where food comes from.”

– Julia, Saint John

Measurement: The number of students in Grades K-12 who take one of several potential physical education courses on an annual basis, such as “Outdoor Pursuits,” “Wellness through Physical Education,” etc.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should encourage schools to introduce active classroom teaching techniques, as a means to both refresh students’ minds and encourage extra physical activity.

Another method of introducing more activity into our schools is through the teaching technique that relates to “active classrooms.” Active classrooms incorporate small bits of activity right into a traditional math, science, or other class, and techniques include a brief walk, jumping jacks, or other light and quick physical activity. Studies have shown physical health and test scores both improve through use of these techniques.

More than 25 per cent of Canadian children and youth are overweight or obese, and that proportion has doubled since 1981. Some estimates suggest the proportion is closer to one third. Childhood obesity increases the risk of adult obesity, with over three quarters of obese children growing up to become obese adults.

Only one quarter of children walk or bike to school, and almost three quarters are sedentary after school. We can encourage activity outside of school hours, but another effective way of ensuring our youth get some daily exercise is integrating it into the school day.

“Sufficient daily physical activity in schools would also be an asset. A parent finishing work at 5 pm, who has to prepare supper and then go through the bathing-reading-sleeping routine around 7 pm, needs to be able to rely on the services taking care of his children during the rest of the day for doing their share in keeping his children healthy. Primary school children sit most of the day at their desk. This is a disastrous start.”

– Anonymous, Acadian Peninsula

Measurement: The number of teachers who have pursued an inservice or other continuing education opportunity on the value of “active classroom techniques” and their execution in the classroom.

BETTER ACCESS TO, AND SAFER, ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure should pave the shoulders of highways running through rural communities, and the Department of Environment and Local Government should require municipalities to form a strategy for complying with the same principle in towns and cities.

Throughout New Brunswick, the car is king when it comes to transportation. Our entire province, including our towns and cities, was built with cars as the assumed method of transportation.

Many rural New Brunswickers commented that they must rely on their vehicles every time they leave the house, due to a lack of paved shoulders along the roads in their communities. New Brunswick is the second most rural province in Canada. In fact, nearly half of New Brunswickers (48 per cent) live in a rural area. Though rural life is often imagined as a healthy, active lifestyle, research finds the reverse to be true. An investment in paved shoulders along the roads in rural areas will pay New Brunswickers back many times over, benefitting health and providing the opportunity for people to be less reliant on vehicles, potentially saving money that could be invested into better quality food.

“Paved shoulders of roads! I live in a rural area and feel unsafe on the narrow unpaved shoulder of the secondary highway I live on. I think this is a major barrier to physical activity for everyone living in rural areas. If all roads in the province had large paved shoulders, then walking, biking, running, etc. would be much easier, safer and more pleasant everywhere! We probably can’t do it all at once but we could make it standard to add paved shoulders as we do road maintenance.”

– Paula, Waasis

Measurement: The active enactment of rules which require paving shoulders of municipal and provincially owned roads on every road which is repaved as they are naturally due for repair.

The Department of Environment and Local Government should require, as a condition of municipal infrastructure or operating grants, municipal plans which directly encourage the building of roads with specifically designated cycling lanes, as well as extensions to path and sidewalk systems.

Though paths and sidewalks exist in cities, feedback from residents of New Brunswick’s cities indicates that many people find active transportation methods to be impractical. People who would like to bike to work feel unsafe sharing the road with vehicles without their own designated cycling lane. City residents would benefit from a more extensive path and sidewalk system, as well as clearly marked and specially designated road lanes for cyclists.

“Increase spending on cycling infrastructure. Build smarter cities where we don’t put as much emphasis on car culture and instead encourage residents to take alternative modes of transportation to work (bike, bus, walk, etc).”

– Samuel, Moncton

Measurement: The provincial posting of publicly available, transparent municipal plans which include sections on how municipalities will promote active transportation through improvements in infrastructure.

The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and municipalities should ensure walkways are well-maintained. This means thinking about design as it relates to user experience, keeping them clear of ice and snow in the winter, and installing and maintaining bright street lights so residents can feel safe walking to their destination at night.

While municipal sidewalks are out of provincial jurisdiction, the province owns and operates a number of pieces of infrastructure in and around municipalities, such as some bridges. Bureaucratic squabbling leaves municipal residents, who do not know and do not care which level of government



owns which section of road, with poorly designed transitions between the two. Picture city-owned roads which have spacious shoulders and are well-ploughed, which connect to provincially owned infrastructure which is neither, which then connects with more city streets. From the view of the citizen, this prevents their active transportation and safe use of infrastructure for no apparent reason.

Other feedback has contained safety concerns due to icy, snowy, or dimly lit sidewalks. While municipalities are primarily responsible, ensuring walkways are clear of snow and ice in the winter and well-lit at night would provide a sense of safety, which could encourage more people to walk to their destination rather than driving.

"I enjoy walking but don't always feel safe in my neighbourhood. Sidewalks aren't cleared in the winter, and some of the street lights have been burnt out for years. Walking in the spring/summer/fall are fine, but Nov-Mar is impossible."

– Anonymous, Saint John

The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure should update the Motor Vehicle Act to introduce a "one-metre law" that would improve the safety of those who choose to use active transportation methods.

Even those who already use active transportation methods feel unsafe. Some commenters have called for a one-metre law which states that vehicles must leave one metre of space when passing a cyclist on a road. Most recently, this proposed legislation has been referred to as "Ellen's Law" in memory of competitive cyclist Ellen Watters, who died before Christmas 2016 after being struck by a vehicle while biking near Sussex.

"This update would legislate that a vehicle must give 1 metre of space between a cyclist and the vehicle before overtaking a cyclist on a road or street. Other changes would include the recognition of bike lanes in provincial legislation which currently does not exist. Improving active transportation in this province is one of the keys to improving the health of New Brunswickers and this is a part of achieving that goal."

– Wayne Arrowsmith, Velo NB

Measurement: The creation of provincial legislation and subsequent enforcement of a "one-metre law."

MAKING THE PROVINCE A HEALTHIER EMPLOYER, AND PROVINCIAL ENVIRONMENTS HEALTHIER

The Departments of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour and Justice and Public Safety, Service New Brunswick, NBCC and CCNB, universities, NB Power, both Regional Health Authorities, and other relevant government workplaces should remove junk food from vending machines and cafeterias in their facilities, and replace them with nutritious alternatives.

Even the most determined of healthy eaters can experience temptation, and some people singled out their workplace as a frequent source of temptation, with easy access to chips, chocolate and candy in vending machines at all times. As the expression goes, “Out of sight, out of mind.” Removing these temptations from publicly owned or influenced workplaces and replacing them with healthier alternatives – replacing pop with water, and chips with trail mix – could help many employees avoid the temptation to indulge.

The largest employer in the province of New Brunswick is the Province of New Brunswick. By becoming a healthier employer for teachers, nurses, bureaucrats, and through multiple agencies which fall under or are influenced by government, the Province could set the bar for healthy living in the workplace.

“We have to make our work places healthy environments to be in. I am a nurse and my work place is polluted with junk food. Occasionally it would be fine but it is all the time. We eat and rest where we work. Health care workers are some of the unhealthiest New Brunswickers. We are setting poor examples. Do as I say not as I do.”
– Anonymous, Woodstock

Measurement: The creation of provincial policy related to workplaces which are publicly owned or influenced, which is audited and reviewed by Service New Brunswick, which governs what can be sold in their cafeteria facilities and vending machines.

The Province should introduce more flexible working hours, where possible, to allow employees the option of including exercise in their day.

Employees spend a significant amount of time in their workplaces. Add to this their obligations outside of work – children, family, errands – and the average worker can struggle to fit regular exercise into their day. Some commenters said they had to make a choice between eating lunch or exercising during their midday break, while others reported feeling rushed if they chose to exercise at lunch. It is safe to say the Province could do more to enable employees to live healthy lifestyles and see positive impacts through productivity gains and reduced injury.

“Having time to exercise built into our work days. Currently I go for a run on my lunch hour, or run home from work, and I do love it but feel rushed. If exercise was as important as the work we do, we would have a much healthier workforce!”
– Laura, Fredericton

The Province should introduce workplace facilities that encourage healthy behaviours.

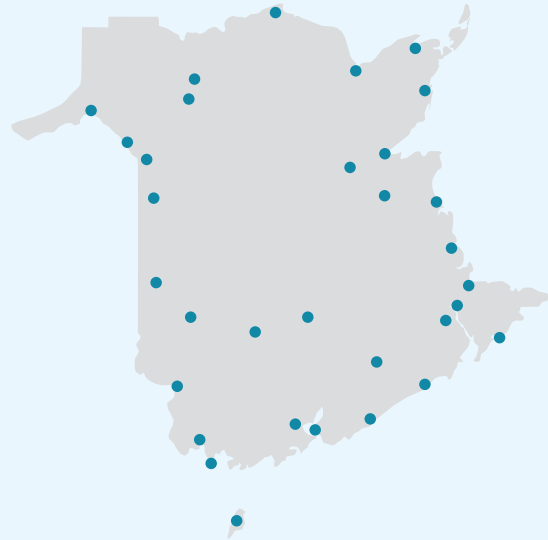
Even for employees who do have the opportunity to exercise during their workday, some may choose not to due to a lack of on-site facilities. This includes things like office gyms, change rooms, and showers. For some commenters, having these facilities available at their workplace would encourage them to be more active.

Reducing or preventing obesity in the workplace would have multiple potential health benefits, higher productivity, and better job performance. The Province has an enormous opportunity to become a leader in the area of healthy living in the workplace.

“Have gyms and change rooms at work.”
– Emily, Moncton

Measurement: Service New Brunswick should lead all government Departments to require the posting of “healthy employer” plans, which would set annual action items for improving the health of public workplaces.

WE RECEIVED
SUGGESTIONS
FROM **EVERY**
RIDING IN THE
PROVINCE



795 PEOPLE
PARTICIPATED

1,452 IDEAS
SUBMITTED



OUR VIDEO WAS
VIEWED NEARLY
200,000 TIMES

ONE SHARED
PHOTO REACHED
25,289 PEOPLE



ENSURING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE IS MORE AFFORDABLE

The Departments of Social Development and Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries should subsidize the cost of nutritious foods with revenue from taxes on junk food.

Poverty and affordability are key factors in New Brunswick's health issues. In fact, a 2006 Census found that around 13.8 per cent of New Brunswickers are living in poverty, and around 38,984 are receiving social assistance.

A common complaint received was the high cost of nutritious, whole foods compared with cheaper processed foods, especially for families with children. As evidenced elsewhere in this report, there is significant support for a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. If implemented, the earnings from this tax could subsidize the cost of healthier foods to make them more affordable.

"They say that our diet accounts for 70% of our health, and physical activity for 30% (or 80-20 depending on the source). For my family, healthy eating is the most difficult part. This year, we planted a garden to help reduce the grocery bill, as eating fresh produce proves very costly for a family experiencing financial difficulties.

When a 2L bottle of water costs more than a 2L bottle of Pepsi, when two apples cost more than a large bag of chips, and considering that fresh produce doesn't keep as well (difficult to buy well in advance, especially when pay cheques are far apart), we have to choose according to what stretches our dollar the most for a maximum amount of time."

– Anonymous, Edmundston

Measurement: Daily fruit and vegetable consumption as measured by Statistics Canada, combined with lower-income earners as measured by the population from the lowest income quintile.

The Department of Social Development should ensure people can afford the basic necessities of life with a livable minimum wage and more affordable housing options located in central areas.

Poverty is statistically correlated with poorer health. Many family doctors know patients with chronic health conditions who must choose between buying food or medication for the month.





Senator Kelvin Ogilvie, Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, that authored the “Obesity in Canada” report in 2016.

The root causes of poverty must be addressed. A minimum wage that allows people to comfortably afford basic living requirements and increased affordable housing options located in central areas are changes that will allow people more opportunity to invest in their health.

“Create an environment which allows these lessons to be put into practice. This requires increased attention and commitment to improving the social determinants of health. The creation of a living wage, access to a continuum of affordable housing including emergency shelters, improved housing conditions, improved public transportation, and improved access to affordable nutritious food will play a huge role.”

– Christy, Saint John

Measurement: The number of New Brunswickers living with a low income, as measured by the New Brunswick Health Council and Statistics Canada.

Popular, but not the best policy: A tax rebate for fitness-related activities, such as gym memberships and organized sports.

Comments received indicate that many New Brunswickers find the cost of gym memberships inaccessible. Others singled out the cost of organized sports as a barrier to their child’s participation. A tax rebate for gym memberships and other activities was a popular suggestion to these complaints.

Unfortunately, it’s not quite that simple. While this suggestion was popular, it’s unlikely to benefit the people who need it most. People living in poverty – the same people who must choose between medication and food if they have a chronic health condition – already receive their taxes back in full from the government. Instead, this suggestion will benefit the people who already go to the gym and can afford to pay the membership fees as they are.

AN EARMARKED TAX ON SUGARY DRINKS FOR HEALTH PROMOTION, OR LOW-INCOME SUBSIDIZATION

The Department of Finance should introduce a tax on sugar-sweetened drinks – and direct the revenue to help low-income New Brunswickers afford healthier food.

A tax on sugary drinks is a perennial – and contentious – proposition.

Despite the controversy, a pop tax was a popular request. Paired with efforts to make a healthy lifestyle more affordable, as described elsewhere in this report, a tax on sugary drinks could potentially reshape people's behaviours.

News reports in September 2016 have shown that New Brunswick's Premier is open to the idea of taxing pop and other sugary drinks, while at the same time coupling it with measures to increase access to healthy food. A report from the World Health Organization (WHO) released in October 2016 recommended that countries raise taxes on sugary drinks to fight obesity, diabetes, and tooth decay. In the same report, they also suggest subsidies for fresh fruits and vegetables to encourage people to eat more of them. In addition, a report from the Canadian Senate earlier in 2016 highlighted the negative health effects of excess sugar consumption.

Meanwhile, the Canadian Beverage Association has strongly opposed such a tax. They have stated that beverages account for a very small portion of calories in the Canadian diet, and said that obesity has continued to rise over the past 20 years while consumption of sugary drinks has declined. In

addition, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation has spoken out against the idea, saying that New Brunswickers are already taxed enough.

Pop taxes have been implemented in other jurisdictions around the world. In fact, Mexico introduced a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages in 2014. Though it's still a fairly recent change, early research indicates that sales of sugary drinks have decreased since the introduction of the tax.

"I would simply like to tell you that I would really like a tax on sweetened drinks. These are readily available everywhere and they are very inexpensive, so that people consume too much... A tax on sweetened drinks could discourage from consuming large quantities and introduce people to better alternatives. The money collected could be redistributed to initiatives promoting healthy lifestyles, like markets selling fresh produce, outdoor clubs, sports organizations, cooking classes, cycling trails, playgrounds, Bench Fit, etc."

– Rachel, Caraquet

"Sugar... tax on soft drinks and a food label easier to understand."

– Daniel, Edmundston

Measurement: The total consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages in New Brunswick, in grams.

ACCESS TO COMMUNITY AND OUTDOOR INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

The Department of Education should enact a policy that requires schools to make reasonable efforts to become places of physical activity in their communities outside of traditional school hours.

Gyms are great, and we applaud anyone who maintains a regular exercise schedule at their local gym. However, it's important to recognize that going to a gym and working out is not feasible for everyone. Common issues we received include a lack of formal exercise facilities in communities, and an inability to afford the cost of a gym membership. For both groups of people, it's important to have an easily accessible public space where they can go to get active.

For many small communities – and quite a few New Brunswick towns could be described as “small communities” – the local school is the biggest and most important facility in the area. It's more than just a place for children to receive an education; it's a communal gathering space, and often one that is familiar to most people in the area.

The role of schools as community hubs is important. Many schools gyms play host to visiting sports teams and concert performances, and serve as voting stations during elections. They're the largest and most convenient facility in many places, and schools themselves are often a point of pride for the community.

Many schools encourage activity by opening after-hours for walking circuits through their halls, soccer on their fields, and basketball in their gyms. We wholeheartedly support this as a provincial initiative which we believe has mutual benefits for active communities and schools alike.

Rinks, basketball courts, and other sport facilities are beneficial to communities as well, however constructing these facilities is expensive. School gyms around the province have already been funded and constructed, and frequently sit empty outside of school hours. They are the ideal place for communities in need of an affordable and accessible activity space for all.

“This past year the NB government decided to double the cost of using the Hampton High School gym for our badminton group, and demanded payment in full up front. I am told by other groups that this was universal throughout the province. Personally, it offends me that I pay for the schools through taxes, and then get treated like I am imposing on the system I am paying for by asking to use an otherwise empty building to try and stay in shape.”

– Peter, Hampton

Measurement: The number of schools reporting use of their facilities after-hours by non-affiliated groups for the purpose of physical exercise.

The Department of Environment and Local Government should require Obesity Infrastructure Initiatives as part of Municipal Plans submitted to them for operational or capital grants.

In addition to school gyms, there are other options for affordable, public infrastructure. Some commenters who had visited communities with such infrastructure – or who reside there themselves – suggested installing it in more New Brunswick communities. Caraquet has a Bench Fit park with signs detailing exercises that can be performed on park benches; the park is reportedly popular among parents looking for space where they can exercise while keeping an eye on their children. In other Canadian communities including Grand Bay-Westfield, modified versions of familiar gym equipment such as leg presses are available outdoors, often along pathways or near playgrounds. This equipment is relatively cost-effective for municipalities, easily accessible for everyone regardless of income, and a viable option during the warmer months for people looking to get active who are unable to attend a typical gym.



“China has some outdoor fitness equipment on the street and in parks and I saw people of all ages young to very old using them. Cuba had cute pictures for exercise stations incorporated in the outside walk path. Get a provincial challenge were we can baseline our fitness and monitor progress.”

– Anonymous

Measurement: The percentage of New Brunswickers active in their leisure time, as measured by Statistics Canada. *Note: this measure can be used to examine several initiatives taken as a whole, rather than the impact of each individual measure.

The Departments of Natural Resources and Tourism, Heritage and Culture should partner to promote “people-powered” trail use, and ensure some trails are strictly for non-motorised use only.

Sometimes referred to as New Brunswick’s “rural sidewalks,” trails are excellent exercise facilities available to all New Brunswickers. However, instead of “green” or “people-powered trails,” many of New Brunswick’s trails are becoming “mixed-use” or “shared” trails. In theory, this means the trail is open to motorised and non-motorised use. In practice, this often means that non-motorised use of the trail simply dwindles.

Some comments have indicated that motorised users on trails are a challenge to their non-motorised users. It can be unsafe to share trails, as motorised vehicles are typically larger and travel at much higher rates of speed than individuals walking or cycling. Trail degradation is a factor, because trail maintenance costs more over stretches used by all-terrain vehicles than those using trails for non-motorised activity.

Instead of allowing inaccurately named “mixed use” trails, the Departments of Natural Resources and Tourism, Heritage and Culture should look to establish separate trail networks to ensure that wherever possible, no groups of users have to share trails for conflicting purposes.

“Trails bring enormous health and economic benefits. New Brunswick has significant trail infrastructure (old rail beds, quiet roads, etc.) – they need to develop them for walking, cycling, etc. for residents and tourists.”

– Bike Saint Andrews, New Brunswick

Measurement: The creation of additional “people-powered” trails in New Brunswick.

ALTERING RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS

The Department of Health should work with provincial business regulators to enact legislation which would require chain restaurants to post caloric labelling of their products directly on restaurant and drive-thru menus.

For people who otherwise have everything working in their favour, making healthy choices can still feel like a minefield of temptation and misinformation. Large chain restaurants, for example, may portray menu options as healthy when they are actually not. Most New Brunswickers do not know there are nearly as many grams of fat in a packet of salad dressing as there are in a cheeseburger.

Displaying nutritional information on chain restaurant menus is one measure that could help people make healthier choices when they're grabbing a quick bite to eat. It is common in multiple jurisdictions in North America, including Ontario. While the ultimate buying decision is in the hands of the consumer, providing them with caloric information at the point of purchase arms them with the knowledge needed to make an informed decision. Companies already have this information – it's just tucked away on their website or in tattered brochures, and difficult to access for all but the most dedicated consumers.

"If we could control the fast-food restaurant proliferation through municipal regulations, like some Quebec cities do, New Brunswick communities would take a massive leap forward!"
– Jérémie, Moncton

Measurement: The number of New Brunswickers who are confident they understand the nutritional content of fast foods they consume, as measured in the future by the New Brunswick Health Council.

Service New Brunswick or the Department of Economic Development should mandate the creation of "healthy" checkout lines at stores, allowing consumers the option of actively avoiding sugary temptation at the point of purchase.

Grocery, pharmacy, and most retail stores are carefully designed to maximize profits, a strategy resulting in impulse purchases from consumers. They appeal to impulse buyers and children, who may in turn influence parents.

Chocolate and candy is conveniently located beside the cash register, and consumers looking for healthy purchases must walk past dozens of temptations on the way there.

The "impulse buy" area by the cash register doesn't need to go away – it could instead be replaced by healthy alternatives.

"Get rid of the "junk food" at the grocery store checkout lines - fill it with healthy snacks instead (almonds, water, hummus/veggie packs, etc.)."
– Emily, Ottawa

Measurement: The number of grocery, pharmacy, and retail stores with at least one "green lane" checkout – a cashier with healthy options available for purchase at the point of sale.

The Province should introduce legislation about the height at which junk foods are allowed to be stocked in stores selling food.

It's a common sight to see tempting foods in bright packages positioned at children's eye level in grocery stores. This isn't a coincidence. They are purposely placed there so children will notice and ask their parents for the treat. Placing these sweets out of their sight and reach will reduce their influence on children and parents.

"As a very fit person myself, I still struggle every day with healthy eating. There are too many bad choices that are easily accessible."
– Caroline, Saint John

Measurement: The successful, clear regulation of the height at which unhealthy foods are sold within stores, with specific accommodation for New Brunswickers with accessibility challenges.

CONCLUSION

Obesity is a current and growing issue in our province that needs to be addressed and that will be addressed as the implications of the crisis only worsen.

When we asked New Brunswickers what barriers they faced to being healthy, we received a flood of responses. In fact, we received over 1,000 suggestions. The sheer number of responses received, as well as their quality, proves that New Brunswickers have significant interest in improving their health.

The response we received to our question confirmed something we'd long suspected – that New Brunswickers have the means, the methods, and the motivation required for significant change. The population of New Brunswick is ready to take back their health.

The good news is, for every barrier, there is a solution – things like greater awareness of active transportation in city planning, and mandatory home economics classes in schools. While not every solution can be implemented quickly or easily, it can be done – as long as we, as a province, make it a priority.

A report commissioned by the Province estimated that bringing our level of obesity down to the Canadian average would reduce hospital beds by 10 per cent. If the government's prediction is correct, it would save New Brunswick \$52 million annually.

We believe New Brunswick can be one of the top 3 healthiest provinces in 10 years. We imagine a province that supports its citizens to achieve their best health. Now, we know what needs to happen for us to get there. It's time to act.

