

**Review of Documentation and Learnings
People Assessing Their Health (PATH)
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PATH Summary

PATH uses a facilitated process to engage a community in developing its own unique community health impact assessment tool (CHIAT). The CHIAT can then be used to examine government policies (municipal, provincial or federal), programs or services offered by governments, institutions and community groups, and major infrastructure projects.

History

PATH I (1996-1997)

The first People Assessing Their Health (PATH) Project was conceived at a time of health system restructuring in Nova Scotia, when a certain amount of planning and decision-making about health services was being devolved to the regional and community level. The goal of the project was *to provide a means for people in selected communities within the Eastern Health Region to identify, define and assess all aspects of health in their communities so that they will become effective participants in a decentralized health system*. The project was funded by the Health Promotion Contribution Fund of the Health Promotion and Social Development Office of Health Canada. The project partners were the Antigonish Women's Association, the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University, and the Public Health Nursing Services of the Eastern Health Region.

The project worked in three communities: Guysborough County Eastern Shore, St. Ann's Bay, and Whitney Pier. Two part-time project coordinators provided support and training for local facilitators who used a variety of adult education and community development techniques to engage people in examining the many factors that affect health and well-being. Each community developed their own unique community health impact assessment tool (CHIAT) based on the factors that they identified. The CHIATs were tested on hypothetical projects and a regional workshop was held at the conclusion of the project to celebrate the work and launch a toolkit entitled *PATHways to Building Healthy Communities in Northeastern Nova Scotia: The PATH Project Resource*.

PATH Network (1997-present)

The PATH Network evolved from the Regional Advisory Committee of the first PATH Project. It brings together people from community-based organizations, health services, community health boards, and universities. Its mission statement is: *A network of groups and individuals, sharing ideas and resources to build healthy communities in northeastern Nova Scotia*. The Network meets on an *ad hoc* basis to share information and develop ways to promote the PATH Process.

PATH II (2000-2002)

The second PATH project, officially titled *Applying Community Health Impact Assessment to Rural Community Health Planning*, was funded by Health Canada's Remote and Rural Health Initiatives fund and was carried out from December 2000 to March 2002. The project sponsors were the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University, and Public Health Services (Districts 7 & 8). The sponsors subsequently partnered with the Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board (ATTCHB). The goal of the projects was to *increase the capacity of volunteers by developing the process and tools for community health impact assessment, which will enable informed decision-making in community level health planning.*

PATH II focused on developing and testing a community health impact assessment tool tailored to the needs of the Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board. It also looked at ways to increase access to the range of information needed for evidence-based decision-making as well as sharing information and lessons learned in the project.

The Community Health Board CHIAT was tested with three community groups (Antigonish Town Council, a local breastfeeding advocacy group, and the Community Health Board itself). A resource package, *PATHways II: The Next Steps – A guide to community health impact assessment*, was produced and widely distributed.

Other PATH Initiatives

Since the completion of the PATH II Project, the PATH Network has been engaged in or associated with several initiatives.

- ♦ The Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board CHIAT has been used by a variety of groups to assess the impact of various proposed projects and policies (groups include the Antigonish Affordable Housing Society; the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, the Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority, the Antigonish County Adult Literacy Association).
- ♦ PATH Network members have facilitated the PATH Process and development of CHIATs in the Town of Canso and with a group in Pictou County.
- ♦ In collaboration with the Coady International Institute at St. Francis Xavier University, the PATH Process has been used with the Association for Social and Health Advancement (ASHA), based in Kolkata, India with staff and board members, volunteers in the field, and two community groups.
- ♦ PATH Network members continue to make presentations to conferences and workshops at the provincial, national and international level.
- ♦ PATH Network members have had articles published in peer-reviewed journals and other international publications.
- ♦ PATH projects, the PATH process, and the Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board CHIAT have been written about, referenced, or adapted in a wide variety of publications and HIA programs.

Documentation reviewed:

- 1997 (October) *PATHways to Building Healthy Communities in Eastern Nova Scotia: The PATH Project Resource*. The People Assessing Their Health Project. Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada: Author
- 1997 (December) Schneider, R.A. *PATH Project Evaluation Final Report*. Baddeck, Nova Scotia, Canada: R.M. Schneider Associates.
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- 1998 (March) Cooper Institute. *Searching for the path to community voice in health promotion: Another step in population health approach*, Report prepared for Health Canada. Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada: Author.
- 1999 (Nov/Dec) Gillis, D.E. The People Assessing Their Health (PATH) Project: Tools for Community Health Impact Assessment. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 90, (Suppl 1), 53-57.
- 2001 (June) Gillis, D.E. & English, L.M. Extension and Health Promotion: An Adult Learning Approach. *Journal of Extension*, 39 (3), online at <http://joe.org/joe2001june/a4.html>
- 2002 (January) Watts, T. *Assessing the Impact of the People Assessing Their Health Project*. Report prepared for the PATH Network. Nova Scotia, Canada: Author
- 2002 (April) Eaton, S.L. *Applying Community Health Impact Assessment to Rural Community Health Planning: Final Report*. Report prepared for Health Canada, Population and Public Health Branch (Atlantic Region).
- 2002 (April) *PATHways II: The Next Steps – A guide to community health impact assessment*. The PATH Network, Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada: Author
- 2002 (May) Peters, N. *Applying Community Health Impact Assessment to Rural Community Health Planning: Evaluation Report*. Report Prepared for the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and the PATH Project Coordinating Committee.
- 2004 Mittelmark, M., Gillis, D. & Hsu-Hage, B. Community development: the role of HIA, in Kemm, J., Parry, J. & Palmer, S. (Eds.) *Health Impact Assessment*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 143-152.

Review and Lessons Learned

PATH has promoted and been engaged in two separate yet related activities:

- a) the community development process that results in the creation of a community health impact assessment tool (CHIAT)
- b) the use of CHIATs to actually carry out health impact assessments

PATH Process and Developing the Tool

- The process increases people's understanding of the determinants of health and how those determinants interact and affect the health of both individuals and communities.
- The process allows people to identify factors in addition to the determinants of health that they see as important priorities for their communities.
- Hallmarks of the process include:
 - ♦ the focus on the adult learning cycle and the value of experiential learning
 - ♦ the use of dialogue and story-telling to root discussions in people's lived experiences
 - ♦ the emphasis on networking within and between communities
- The process builds the capacity of individuals and groups to engage in health planning and decision-making at the community level
- The process of developing a CHIAT needs to respect and be sensitive to community timelines
- The development of a CHIAT needs to involve people from many sectors within a community
- Having the development of a CHIAT (a clear and concrete outcome) as a goal of the PATH process motivated people to stay involved in the process
- Community based processes require resources including funding for people to participate (e.g., travel), resources to develop leadership (facilitation) and administrative support (photocopying, organizing meetings, etc.)
- The CHIAT needs to be grounded in a broad vision of health
- There needs to be a balance between the process of awareness raising and the actual development of the CHIAT (both are important)
- Since the PATH Process is intensive and takes significant time, an alternative is for people to use existing CHIATs that they adapt for their communities

Doing Community Health Impact Assessment

- Community health impact assessment validates local-level knowledge
- The broader system of decision-making needs to value local input and community participation in order for community HIA to have an impact
- Groups who participated in PATH I did not use their CHIATs to undertake community level HIAs but they did use PATH processes and techniques in other community endeavours
- The CHIAT developed by the Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board is useful for assessing different types of projects and policies

- The use of community health impact assessment tools requires support (trained facilitation, organizational support, money for photocopying, etc.)
- Communities need access to epidemiological (hard) data that is understandable and meaningful in order to make community health impact assessment a valuable resource for decision-making
- Decision-makers have to find a way to validate the input of the community and to respond to identified needs