

# The Community Health Reporter

From the Community Health & Well-Being: A Resource for Planning Report  
Volume 2, Issue 2

## DID YOU KNOW . . .

### IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO:

- Lung cancer in women is increasing?
- Four babies in one hundred born have a birth defect?
- Hay fever is the most common chronic health problem?
- One in ten has a long-term disability?

In this issue of the Reporter, we look at four health problems in Southwestern Ontario (SWO): cancer, birth defects, chronic health problems and disability. All four are problems that each one of us (may) encounter personally or through the experience of friends and family. They can cause long-term social, psychological and economic impacts.

## CANCER

Cancer is one of the leading causes of illness and death in Southwestern Ontario. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of all deaths occurring each year in the province as a whole are due to cancer. Some of the known causes of cancer include: tobacco use (the leading cause of cancer in Ontario); diets high in fat and calories and low in fruits and vegetables; alcohol use; sunlight; workplace exposure to chemicals; and radiation.

Lung cancer is increasing in women but decreasing in men. This is most likely because more women are smoking now than did 30 years ago, while fewer men are smoking. In addition, adolescent smoking, particularly among female teens, has been increasing dramatically in the last few years, with close to one student in three in grades 7-13 smoking.



## YOUR HEALTH & TOMORROW'S HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

**FACT:** Some diseases and chronic conditions are preventable through healthy lifestyle choices.

**SITUATION:** The total cost of illness in Canada in 1993 was estimated at \$156.9 billion. Of this amount, \$38.3 billion was from the value of time lost due to long-term disability, and \$29.3 billion was from future productivity lost due to premature mortality. Cancer alone had a total overall cost of \$13.1 billion. This amounts to a very large burden on our health care system.

**SOLUTION:** There are many things we can do to prevent chronic diseases. Of course, there will always be causes over which we have no personal control, but we should make every effort to do what we can to make ourselves and our community healthier. See the end of this newsletter for some suggestions.

## BIRTH DEFECTS

Four babies in every one hundred born have some birth defect. There are more than 3,000 different types of birth defects, and they cause 30% of deaths in very young babies. Birth defects are lower in SWO overall than Ontario as a whole, but some counties within our region have higher rates. The causes of many defects are either unknown or very complex, involving heredity, lifestyle, occupation, environment, and exposure to drugs and chemicals during pregnancy.

## CHRONIC HEALTH PROBLEMS

A chronic health problem is one that persists for a long time. Overall, almost half of the residents of SWO report at least one chronic health problem. The most common are:

Hay fever	15%
Arthritis	12%
Hypertension	8%
Skin allergies	7%
Back pain	6%

Although some of these conditions are not serious in themselves, they can lead to other more serious illnesses such as heart disease and stroke, in addition to reducing the quality of life significantly for people suffering from them.

## LONG-TERM DISABILITY

Almost one person in ten in SWO reports having a long-term disability. A long-term disability is a physical or mental condition that limits what a person can do when compared to other people of the same age. It also means they need help with some everyday tasks.

Your chance of having a disability increases as you get older. In SWO, more than one person in five over the age of 65 has a disability. However, people aged 20-44 make up almost one-third of the total number of people with disabilities.

Having a disability is not just an inconvenience, it can have a strong impact on quality of life. People with disabilities have been found to be more likely to:

- live in low income
- be unemployed
- have less education
- use medical services
- report more stress
- have lower levels of well-being



## WHAT CAN I DO?



### For yourself:

- Number One - **QUIT SMOKING!**
- Follow Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating (Health Canada)
- Use sunscreen when outside
- Exercise regularly

### For women of child-bearing age, both before and during pregnancy:

- Take folic acid and multivitamin supplements - consult your doctor for the proper amount
- Avoid excessive alcohol intake
- Ensure your vaccinations, especially for rubella, are up to date
- Eat a healthy diet

### For your community:

- Join the Council for a Tobacco-Free Community, London-Middlesex (phone 519-663-5317, ext. 2314)
- Encourage local schools to provide more healthy foods for our children
- Help change community attitudes toward people with disabilities. Focus on what they can do, rather than what they can't do.

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

For information on some of the issues in this newsletter, you may contact:

The Canadian Cancer Society, London-Middlesex Unit at (519)432-1137

The Middlesex-London Health Unit at (519)663-5317

### Newsletter information source:

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### To order a full copy of the report please contact:

Population and Community Health Unit, Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, H110, Health Sciences Addition, The University of Western Ontario

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Ph: (519) 661-2111 x6212 or x6610

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Our mission is to increase awareness of health problems and their solutions.