



A–Z of Healthy Communities

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF ONTARIO HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
COALITION & BC HEALTHY COMMUNITIES SOCIETY

I - Inclusion

What is Diversity?

Diversity is a broad term that refers to the variety of differences among people. Diversity can exist along many dimensions, such as, but not limited to ethnicity, cultural traditions, skin colour, age, ability, religion, place of origin, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, education, economic status, work experience, and family status. Where we fall along these dimensions of diversity can impact our access to power or privilege, and multiple dimensions can intersect to compound the forces of exclusion.

Benefits of Diversity

“Decades of research by organizational scientists, psychologists, sociologists, economists and demographers show that socially diverse groups (that is, those with a diversity of race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation) are more innovative than homogeneous groups.... This is not only because people with different backgrounds bring new information. Simply interacting with individuals who are different forces group members to prepare better, to anticipate alternative viewpoints and to expect that reaching consensus will take effort.” (Katherine W. Phillips)³

Defining Inclusion

Social inclusion is *“the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.”*¹ It is aimed at creating conditions which enable the full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic and political activities, as well as participation in decision-making processes.²

Why is inclusion important?

Inclusion is vital to health and well-being; we all need to feel we belong and are valued by others. We have a right to be treated fairly and equitably. We also need to be actively involved in making decisions that will affect us, and ensure that our needs and interests are being addressed. However, we live in a diverse and changing society, in which barriers exist at all levels that result in the inequitable treatment of some individuals and groups. A healthy community is an inclusive community, in which thoughtful efforts are made to ensure that all residents have equitable access to resources and are represented in decision-making bodies.

Overcoming Barriers to Inclusion

Efforts to become more inclusive must start with reflecting on our own attitudes and behaviour, analyzing organizational policies and structures and identifying barriers. Often these can be grouped into four categories: not enough time, resources, knowledge or support. However, with strong leadership and commitment, progress can be made. Ensure inclusion strategies are prioritized in your organization’s strategic plan, and consider writing in a budget line for inclusive activities in funding proposals. Education doesn’t have to be formalized; you can learn from each other if you have a safe and supportive environment. Look for opportunities to partner with other organizations with similar goals to share ideas and resources.⁴

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, [Action for Inclusion: A Resource Kit for Community Conversations](#) (2017).

Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, [Kitchen Table Conversations for Action on Inclusion: project resources](#)

HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, [HR Toolkit: Diversity at Work](#)

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration](#) (2009)

World Health Organization, [Social Exclusion](#)

REFERENCES

- ¹ World Bank, Brief: Social Inclusion (March 28, 2017) <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialdevelopment/brief/social-inclusion>.
- ² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration (2009), <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2009/Ghana/inclusive-society.pdf>.
- ³ Phillips, Katherine W, “How Diversity Makes Us Smarter,” Scientific American (October 1, 2014) <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/>
- ⁴ Much of this material was adapted from: Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, Action for Inclusion: A Resource Kit for Community Conversations (2017). https://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/sites/default/files/Action_on_Inclusion_Resource_Kit.pdf



Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
Coalition des communautés en santé de l'Ontario



BC Healthy Communities
People. Place. Potential.



OHCC enables communities to create and sustain positive change through equitable community engagement, intersectoral partnerships, political commitment, healthy public policy, and asset-based community development. BC Healthy Communities supports multi-sectoral groups to build their capacity to create healthy communities.