

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Sponsored article: Alberta Blue Cross® supports CHCP

Through support from Alberta Blue Cross, the CHANGE Health Community Program (CHCP), led by Dr. Doug Klein of the University of Alberta's Department of Family Medicine, is working to create a new model of health service delivery that supports preventive, personalized and community-relevant care to Albertans.

As a family physician, Dr. Klein sees first-hand the importance of building healthy habits at a young age. "What I am seeing is that children and young adults are growing up without the skills to live well and healthy," says Dr. Klein. "Down the road when they develop a chronic disease, it is really challenging for those people to change their lifestyle because they don't have those building blocks."

That is why CHCP supports families as they come together to learn healthy living through four main areas: nutrition, physical activity, mental health and social connection. Health professionals such as dietitians, exercise specialists and mental health clinicians help guide these sessions and respond to questions that families might have.

What does the CHCP offer?

CHCP engages families in local communities to enjoy cooking classes, outdoor activities and sessions that focus on improving relationships, being more mindful of our mental health and being more involved in our communities. In addition, families participate in online get-togethers to connect socially, learn about and discuss relevant health topics, and connect with health professionals. There is also a private, online community group for people to connect, share stories and engage in wellness challenges. The CHCP program meets families where they are, personalizing the program and its learning modules to support families in the areas that are important to them.



CHCP supports families as they come together to learn healthy living through four main areas: nutrition, physical activity, mental health and social connection. (Image credit: Gustavo Rezende, pixabay.com)

CHCP was launched just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and ran throughout this critical time when families were isolated from their friends and communities. The pandemic was a stressful and difficult experience for most Canadians, and health concerns were at the forefront of people's minds. CHCP reminded families about and provided an opportunity for families to focus on healthy habits while they learned new skills to support them in their wellness journeys.

“We hear from families that many of them have formed connections through this program that have moved beyond just the weekly sessions,” says Amanda Radil, evaluation lead with CHANGE Health Programs in the University of Alberta’s Department of Family Medicine. “They have met new friends [and] they have met new families that they can connect with.”

Melanie Fuller, director of Wellness at Alberta Blue Cross, is pleased to see this innovative program reach families across Alberta. “The program equips families with the knowledge, skills and resources to address health concerns through fun and educational activities. The CHCP takes a preventative approach to health, supporting the development of healthy and resilient families.” CHCP impacts

In its first year, CHCP enrolled 122 families (230 adults and 245 youths) in 11 locations across Alberta. Sixty per cent of the participants reported having maintained their physical activity levels after the program ended. Participants reported maintaining strong mental health levels, in particular resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. All of participants said that they would join the program again and would recommend it to their family and friends.

Participant testimonials

The positive impact that the program had on the lives of participants was undeniable.

“I love that we touched on everything from mental health to physical and nutritional health. That was super fun because that’s life — you have to touch on all three of those things, and then some. Interacting with people was nice, even though it was via Zoom.”

“I loved learning about gardening. We were doing it online, so they sent us some stuff, like some seeds to plant. So, we did that experiment with the kids because I had never gardened before. Ever since they taught us to do that, to do that experiment, I started doing gardening. I have a little backyard that I have planted some carrots, garlic and onions in.”

“I’ve been trying to cook more at home. I think a realization has been that because we fly by the seat of our pants so much, a loose schedule had started in the house. So I have been paying attention to cues just to make sure we’re getting the proper meals in at the proper times and, you know, hitting bedtime at a roughly decent hour.”

How can families sign up?

Now in its second year of programming, CHCP welcomes all families in Alberta to join the program at no cost. For information about the CHCP and to see if there is a program in your area, please email chcp@ualberta.ca.

More information about [Alberta Blue Cross and its involvement in the community](#) and the [CHCP](#) is also available on their respective websites.

About Alberta Blue Cross

As Alberta's largest benefits carrier, Alberta Blue Cross provides benefits to meet the needs of over 1.8 million Albertans including individuals and families, seniors, and large and small employers. Through our unique mandate, we are focused on championing wellness for all our customers and across our communities to support those we serve in living their best lives.

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