

2012

# PRIMARY HEALTH CARE



Association of  
**Registered Nurses**  
of Newfoundland  
and Labrador



This Position Statement was approved by ARNNL Council in 2012.

The Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador (ARNNL) advocates for the adoption of primary health care (PHC) as a means of sustaining a high quality comprehensive health system into the future.

### **Concept Description**

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1978) defines primary health care as essential health care made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community by means acceptable to them through their full participation and at a cost that the community and country can afford to maintain at every stage of their development in the spirit of self-reliance and self-determination. Essential health care includes health promotion, disease prevention, curative, rehabilitative and supportive care.

Primary health care is further described as both a philosophy of health care and an approach to providing health services.

### **ARNNL ADVOCATES FOR THE ADOPTION OF PRIMARY HEALTH CARE AS A MEANS OF SUSTAINING A HIGH QUALITY COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH SYSTEM INTO THE FUTURE**

As a philosophy PHC is based on the values of equity, solidarity and social justice. PHC supports the end of exclusion promoting accessibility by focusing on individual and community strengths, opportunities and involvement (WHO, 2008). The primary health care philosophy identifies that citizens have the requisite skill and knowledge to improve their health and social status. This philosophy requires that citizens work collaboratively with health care professionals and representatives in other sectors to mobilize community efforts to promote, achieve, and maintain health while taking an active role in developing strategies to meet their identified health needs (Mable, Marriot & Mable, 2012).

As an approach to health services, PHC is described as the foundation. It should be the first point-of-entry to the health system. PHC sites offer a broader scope of services; emphasize the determinants of health and the importance of coordination and integration of services. Further, at its core is a focus on population health, illness prevention, and health promotion. PHC supports utilization of the most appropriate provider and working collaboratively in teams (Mable, Marriot & Mable, 2012).

Primary care is an important aspect of primary health care; however it is not, by itself, primary health care. Primary care is illness-orientated and expert driven. It is directed at identifying individual health problems and providing treatment and follow-up for specific problems. Even though these terms are defined differently they are often [mis]used interchangeably in the literature, in policy and in practice.

The principles of primary health care should guide action within each type of health service whether they are promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative, or supportive in nature.



The principles of primary health care as defined by the World Health Organization (1978) are:

**Accessibility** - essential and appropriate health services are available to citizens within a reasonable geographic distance by an appropriate provider and within a time frame that is appropriate.

**Public participation** - citizens and communities have a right and responsibility to be active partners in making decisions about their own health and the health of their communities.

**Health promotion** - focus on enabling citizens to increase control over and improve their health and well-being through action on five strategies: building healthy public policy, creating environments which support healthy living, strengthening community action, helping people develop their skills, and re-orientating the health care system.

**Appropriate technology** - the people, procedures, equipment, drugs, and resources used to provide health services are effective, acceptable to citizens and providers, affordable, and therefore, sustainable.

**Intersectoral collaboration** - action from all sectors (government, community, health) is essential for meaningful effect on the determinants of health (i.e., early childhood development, income, employment, education, environment, etc.).

*PHC REQUIRES A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH, ONE THAT SUPPORTS ALL MEMBERS OF THE TEAM WORKING TOGETHER AS EQUAL CONTRIBUTORS AND PRACTICING TO THEIR FULL POTENTIAL*

### **ARNNL Position**

ARNNL believes that increased investments in primary health care at the provincial and regional levels are key to sustaining our publicly-funded health care system. Government and regional health authorities must collaborate to realign health and social policy, as well as funding processes, to make PHC a reality.

ARNNL believes that a refocusing of public policies and a reorientation of health professionals and representatives in sectors outside the health system is required to reform the health care system and deliver health services based on a PHC philosophy.

ARNNL believes that PHC requires a collaborative approach, one that supports all members of the team working together as equal contributors and practicing to their full potential. It encourages the most appropriate use of all health providers to maximize the potential of all health resources. Ensuring the competencies and skill sets of providers are maintained.

ARNNL believes that all registered nurses as individuals and as a collective should advocate for, and apply the principles of, primary health care to their practice. As a profession, registered nurses and nurse practitioners in all settings (by virtue of their education and professional capacity) are well-positioned to provide primary health care services.



## Resources

Canadian Nurses Association, (2011). *Demonstrating Leadership in Primary Health Care*. In press. Ottawa: Author.

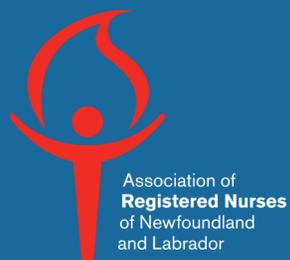
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