



Canada's source for
HIV and hepatitis C
information

La source canadienne
de renseignements sur
le VIH et l'hépatite C

From *HIV in Canada: A primer for service providers*

Sexual health promotion

Key Points

- Sexual health promotion is the delivery of strategies to promote sexual health.
- Promotion of sexual health behaviours can involve complex interventions that address issues related to empowerment, negotiation skills, self-esteem and sexual health knowledge.

The World Health Organization defines sexual health as:

“...a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.” (WHO, 2006)

According to this definition, sexual health is an important part of everyone's overall health and well-being. It is essential that sexual health promotion activities encompass more than just prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections but include activities that affect such things as healthy relationships, self-esteem, intimacy and pleasure.

Behavioural approaches to sexual health promotion attempt to motivate individuals and groups to change their behaviour through a range of educational, motivational, peer-group, skills-building and community normative approaches. Promotion of sexual health behaviours can involve complex interventions that address issues related to empowerment, negotiation skills, self-esteem and sexual health knowledge. Behavioural strategies to reduce the sexual transmission of HIV include attempts to delay the onset of first intercourse, decrease the number of sexual partners and increase the correct and consistent use of effective prevention strategies (e.g., condoms).

Evidence suggests that the favourable behaviour changes seen in individuals during the first year following exposure to a behavioural prevention intervention can fade over time. At the population level, positive behaviour changes often fail to endure because these changes require a level of diligence — for example, consistent condom use — that is often difficult to maintain over the course of people's everyday lives and within their social contexts. This supports the need for ongoing messaging and support programming.

Resources

[Canadian guidelines for sexual health education](#) ^{PDF} – Public Health Agency of Canada

[SexandU.ca](#) – Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada

Source

1. WHO. *Defining sexual health: report of a technical consultation on sexual health, 28–31 January 2002* . Geneva: World Health Organization; 2006. Available from: http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual_health/defining_sexual_health.pdf ^{PDF}
2. World Health Organization. *Sexual and reproductive health* . Available from: http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual_health/sh_definitions/en/index.html

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Disclaimer

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