

## **Overview**

“The primary factors that shape the health of Canadians are not medical treatments or lifestyle choices but rather the living conditions they experience. These conditions have come to be known as the social determinants of health. This information – based on decades of research and hundreds of studies in Canada and elsewhere – is unfamiliar to most Canadians. Canadians are largely unaware that our health is shaped by how income and wealth is distributed, whether or not we are employed and if so, the working conditions we experience.

Our health is also determined by the health and social services we receive, and our ability to obtain quality education, food and housing, among other factors. And contrary to the assumption that Canadians have personal control over these factors, in most cases these living conditions are – for better or worse – imposed upon us by the quality of the communities, housing situations, work settings, health and social service agencies, and educational institutions with which we interact.

Improving the health of Canadians requires we think about health and its determinants in a more sophisticated manner than has been the case to date.