

Institute of Population and Public Health  
Applied Public Health Chair  
Impact Case Study



**Dr. Marjorie MacDonald**  
Advancing public health systems research in Canada



**Research Focus**

Population health interventions in Canada are typically delivered through, or in collaboration with, public health systems. However, most health services research funding is directed towards the larger health-care system. This trend, combined with the lack of a pan-Canadian agenda for public health systems research (PHSR), has created a significant knowledge gap in this field.

In recent years, concerns have been raised about the inability of Canada’s public health system to meet the growing needs of the population. These systems include a full range of governmental and non-governmental players involved in public health—from health-care providers and public health agencies to community-based organizations.

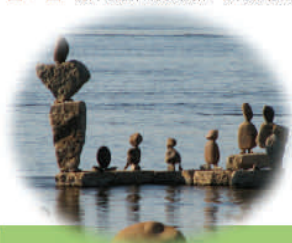
Dr. Marjorie MacDonald, Applied Public Health Chair, has made it her goal to create a pan-Canadian agenda and network for PHSR devoted to studying the organization, funding, and delivery of public health services within communities and the impact of these services on population health.

After years of laying the groundwork for this goal by networking, team building, establishing partnerships, and securing funding, Dr. MacDonald is poised to see her dream become a reality. A national think tank will launch this PHSR initiative in 2011.

**Research Impact: Making a Difference**

The pathway to this point began in British Columbia, where Dr. MacDonald was instrumental in mobilizing an interdisciplinary group of researchers, decision-makers, and practitioners to develop a comprehensive PHSR agenda for the province—possibly the first effort of its kind in Canada.

The group launched the Core Public Health Functions Research Initiative (CPHFRI), co-led by decision-maker Dr. Trevor Hancock. The Initiative’s goal was to develop a research program and training opportunities to assess the impact and outcomes of BC’s Core Public Health Functions Framework. Through the project, the researchers hope to increase the capacity of decision-makers to use evidence to improve public health policy and practice and, thereby, population health.



Successful in obtaining more than \$3 million in peer-reviewed funding to support this research to date, CPHFRI has broadened its focus over the past couple of years to try and expand the PHSR agenda beyond the borders of BC. At a 2009 conference of the Canadian Public Health Association, Dr. MacDonald and her colleagues facilitated a workshop to gauge interest in a pan-Canadian PHSR agenda and found strong support from participants across the country.

Recently, CPHFRI has intensified these efforts by partnering with researchers and knowledge-users in Ontario to do compare in the two provinces. The Ontario group, whose members came together as a result of research initiated by Dr. MacDonald through an emerging team grant, plans to form its own network to develop a collaborative PHSR agenda for Ontario.

To take things a step further, efforts are underway to host a group of PHSR researchers and knowledge-users from across the country at a think-tank aimed at developing a pan-Canadian PHSR agenda and network. The event, which will be held in April 2011, will focus on identifying research priorities, establishing clear linkages between the strategic directions of the CHSRF and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (e.g., Institute of Population and Public Health and the Institute of Health Services and Policy Research), establishing consensus on a Canadian PHSR agenda, developing a five-year plan to advance the agenda, and creating a Canada-wide network of PHSR researchers and supporters.

In addition to funding from a CIHR Meetings, Planning, and Dissemination grant, several partners have committed a total of more than \$40,000 in additional funding to the meeting, including the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, the BC Centre for Disease Control, and two other Applied Public Health Chairs. This level of support from collaborators is a strong indication of the importance attached to this work and its relevance to these and other organizations with a stake in public health.

### Want to Know More?

For more information, visit the Core Public Health Functions Research Initiative (CPHRI) website at:  
<http://web.uvic.ca/~cphfri/>

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