Advocating for a widespread collective movement that promotes healthy lifestyle habits as a major driver for preventing disease and improving living conditions for all Quebeckers.

October 2016
Declaration of Alliance for a Healthy Québec

We are decision-makers and stakeholders from municipalities, schools and organizations that serve families, young children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and the socially disadvantaged.

We work in public health, in R and D and evaluation sectors, in workplace and in citizen support groups.

We strive every day to improve the living conditions of all Quebeckers by playing a direct role in living environments and by ensuring solidarity and support services.

We believe that now is the time to unite and put forth a project that will place Québec at the forefront of Western societies with respect to disease prevention by making the adoption of healthy lifestyle habits in people’s daily lives the focus of our activities.

The 20th century was marked by the Quiet Revolution, in which Quebeckers showed the rest of the world that they were able to take their destiny into their own hands. We would like the 21st century to be marked by an “Active Revolution” which offers citizens conditions that allow them to be more physically active, eat better and live healthier lives.

Rising health costs are putting enormous pressure on the Québec tax system. Disease prevention must become a priority if we wish to curb this trend.

Focusing on the quality of life is the smartest investment we can make to create a healthier Québec, where prevention is better than a cure, our living environments are designed to foster a healthy lifestyle and everyone works together to improve the living conditions of the population.
Transforming our environments and improving our practices

There is a strong scientific consensus that the integration of healthy lifestyle habits on a daily basis requires an inter-sectoral approach, which involves actions that target not only individuals, but also their physical environments (infrastructures and equipment, urban planning, active and public transportation, public markets, parks and adapted schoolyards, etc.) and their social, cultural, political (a smoking ban in different settings: school grounds, parks, restaurants) and economic environments, with a view to transforming society’s social standards and prevailing values.

This is the concept behind environments that promote healthy lifestyles. This concept is based on the recognition of a collective responsibility that goes beyond actions aimed at changing individual behaviours.

In other words, if we want the population to adopt a healthier lifestyle, it must first recognize the importance and benefits of being more physically active, eating better and not smoking. This is the role of awareness-raising.

However, in order for the public to go from willingness to action, it must also be offered concrete alternatives. We must improve the availability and accessibility of active and public transportation, upgrade and adapt recreational equipment that fosters active and social leisure activities, adopt effective regulations to oversee the agrifood industry, eliminate food deserts, reduce tobacco advertising and access to tobacco, according to the best practices identified by R and D and evaluation specialists. This is a substantial undertaking that entails taking collective action in living environments.

To that end, working to ensure that environments promote a healthy lifestyle not only supports individuals in their willingness to adopt better behaviours, but also becomes a powerful driver for sustainably improving the living conditions of the entire population and, in particular, of socially disadvantaged individuals.
Supporting the continuation of the movement

Over the past decade, the healthy lifestyle movement has brought together thousands of organizations from the community, early childhood, education and municipal sectors across Québec. They have helped advance the idea that a healthy society must offer its citizens, especially young people, the best conditions for adopting healthy lifestyles.

The efforts and talent of this extensive network have helped significantly advance the social standard on healthy lifestyle habits. Decision-makers at all levels are now more aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle in preventing disease and developing a healthy society.

Collaborative work in communities has demonstrated that we can change things by adopting a shared vision and by creating conditions allowing all decision-makers, managers and professionals to make clear commitments in this direction.

This assessment of the situation shows that it is now within our reach to make Québec a society in which active living, healthy eating and non-smoking are an integral part of our lifestyle.

The tipping point

The work of the past decade has allowed us to reach a tipping point. If we intensify our collective efforts, if we make it a priority to put in place all the necessary environments, we will be able to significantly reduce health problems such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and several types of cancer, while fostering educational success, mental health, the overall development of young children, the independence of disabled persons, the quality of life of the elderly, and so on.

The expiry of the partnership agreement Fonds pour la promotion des saines habitudes de vie (Fund for the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyle Habits) made up of equal contributions from the Québec government and the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation over the past 10 years, is, however, causing concern among healthy lifestyle stakeholders, who fear the financial disengagement of public authorities in this area.

That is why Alliance for a Healthy Québec is urging the Québec government to support a large-scale initiative for continuing and consolidating the creation of environments that promote healthy lifestyle habits, health and quality of life. Municipal and educational partners, along with thousands of other organizations that provide support for Quebeckers, will be active participants in this undertaking.

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Health issues still important

Between 2010 and 2030, the direct costs of the leading chronic diseases will increase by 72%, from $1.8 billion to $3.1 billion a year. The indirect costs (premature mortality, disability, etc.) will rise by 61%, from $5.8 billion to $9.4 billion.1

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• The direct healthcare costs of diseases associated with smoking are estimated at $1 billion, and total costs, at more than $4 billion each year.2

• Direct and indirect obesity costs in Québec are estimated at $3 billion a year.3

This situation alone shows the importance of sustaining the healthy lifestyle movement among stakeholders who are already committed and bringing the movement to other sectors.

Supporting the will of the people

The public now recognizes that having healthy lifestyle habits is an integral part of quality of life.

Indeed, 7 out of 10 (71%) Quebeckers believe that different aspects of a healthy lifestyle are key ingredients for a good quality of life.4 To this end, they are prepared to do more, but want to be supported in their efforts.

• 87% of Quebeckers say that they would like to live healthy, eat better and be more physically active. But, at the same time, they admit that they often find it difficult to incorporate these healthy lifestyle habits into their daily life.5

• 82% of Quebeckers feel that parents are not the only ones responsible for the healthy eating habits of young people. They believe the responsibility must also be borne by institutions (government, municipalities, schools and daycare centres).6

3 Estimation from INSPQ
4 Survey conducted on behalf of the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation by Léger among 2006 respondents in Québec (June 2015)
5 ibid
6 Survey conducted on behalf of Québec en Forme by Ad Hoc Research among 1009 respondents in Québec (December 2015)
• 66% of Quebeckers think that schools could do more to foster access to healthy eating. This percentage rises to 76% for municipalities, and 83% for governments.\(^7\)

Quebeckers have a very strong desire to adopt healthier lifestyle habits, and are calling for effective support measures.

**Seizing the opportunity**

The prevailing social and political context provides an excellent opportunity to support the implementation of environments that promote healthy lifestyle habits:

- the federal government’s new infrastructure project, which will invest billions of dollars in municipal projects planned for 2016–2017;
- the announcement expected in Fall 2016 from the Québec government’s Policy on Preventive Health;
- the 2016–2019 school infrastructure reinvestment program announced by Québec’s Minister of Education;
- the introduction of smoking bans in the recent Tobacco Control Act.

However, to achieve this goal, it is important to ensure that the reinvestment programs integrate best practices with regard to environments that promote healthy lifestyle habits and universal access.

Organizations promoting healthy lifestyle habits must be allowed to expand their range of support activities as well as the expertise that speaks directly to all decision-makers, stakeholders and citizens (knowledge transfer, networking, communications, infrastructure activities, accessibility).

Resources must also be available to fund the continuation of the collaborative work carried out by these organizations. In order to ensure the effectiveness of these investments, it is important they be supported and coordinated at the local, regional and national levels, and that they complement the regular programs of the different partners.

To achieve the greatest possible efficiency for each of the investments, the work must be carried out by the organizations with the greatest expertise in each field of action and correspond to best practices, while always leaving room for innovation.

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\(^7\) Ibid.
A major shift to promote prevention

The Québec government intends to implement a preventive health policy in which the adoption of healthy lifestyle habits constitutes one of the key objectives.

This policy brings about a significant change in our approach to health, where prevention plays a larger role.

It aims to act on a number of factors to improve Quebeckers’ state of health and quality of life and reduce social inequalities in health.

Moreover, Québec can rely on a group of mobilized R and D people in healthy lifestyle habits for evidence and scientific evaluation.

Alliance for a Healthy Québec believes this shift is long overdue. We now have the means to take action. Doing nothing is no longer an option.

All of society engaged in an ambitious plan

Our proposed plan focuses on the engagement of all organizations working in living environments.

Québec has a tremendous number of organizations that engage employees and volunteers to improve the quality of life in communities.

To ensure their success, it is crucial that these organizations have access to programs, tools and expertise facilitating the integration of healthy lifestyle habits in all decisions and actions under their area of responsibility. A commitment must be made to recognize the leadership and creativity of these key stakeholders, who are involved at several levels and have a constant concern for quality of life, health and healthy lifestyle habits.

Here are some concrete actions that illustrate how these organizations contribute to the development of healthy environments.

**Stakeholders from the municipal sector** promote the growth of public and active transportation; the design, availability and use of accessible sports facilities; and the creation of community gardens and parks. They also provide support for the set-up of public markets, the installation of water fountains, and the introduction of programs and services for citizens to foster healthy lifestyle habits.

**Stakeholders from the education community** implement programs targeting the improvement of cooking skills, the upgrading of sports facilities and equipment, and the reorganization of cafeterias by rethinking schoolyard design and offering complementary activities so that physical activity and healthy eating are part of students’ daily lives.

**Stakeholders from early childcare services** introduce, in both daycare centres and family agency services, measures fostering the overall development of young people, through active play, taste discovery, support for parenting skills, etc.
Stakeholders from services for seniors implement organized recreational activities to help seniors improve their living conditions and their physical and cognitive health, as well as to foster their social integration.

Public health stakeholders and anti-smoking groups provide support for changes in living environments and continue their efforts to reduce the smoking rate which, at approximately 19%, is still one of the highest in Canada, with a target of 12% by 2021, and less than 5% by 2035.

There is a need to support and reinforce measures to prevent smoking and help smokers who are trying to overcome their addiction, but who on average must try six times before succeeding.

Researchers, experts and supporting players, based on proven practices, inform, engage and provide tools and guidance for decision-makers and public and private professionals from various levels of government.

Our actions must be based on the most efficient practices and be assessed to implement the most efficient strategies.

Community groups help Quebeckers acquire the competencies necessary for the integration of healthy lifestyle habits by playing a leadership role in communities, including Aboriginals, and by offering accessible activities that promote participation and social inclusion.

Family support groups help implement policies that facilitate work-family balance in order to give families who don’t have time for family meals a break; foster regular physical activity; and provide support for family caregivers.

Stakeholders from the world of work continue to introduce the “Healthy Enterprise” standard by supporting the implementation of measures fostering work-life balance.

Organizations conduct communication and education campaigns, which help motivate individuals and families to take action by continuing their efforts in this area.

Stakeholders from the health network support living environments and the population on a daily basis in the acquisition and maintenance of healthy lifestyle habits.

Other partners contribute to the best of their ability.

Stakeholders in food production, processing and distribution must join in to increase the availability of a variety of locally grown nutritious foods and adopt certain practices to promote better nutrition.
Adopting the means to act together now

Whereas:

• the Québec government wishes to implement a preventive health policy that requires the investment of significant resources without compromising other State missions;

• increased health costs, particularly those associated with the treatment of chronic diseases attributable to poor lifestyle habits such as smoking, a sedentary lifestyle and poor diet, are creating undue pressure on Québec’s public finances and taking up too much of its budget, which limits our ability to invest in programs that support our economic, social and human development;

• thousands of organizations are already working to foster the adoption of healthy lifestyle habits, proposing a concerted plan to the Québec government, and are in need of resources to continue their efforts;

• the work of the past decade has helped improve the social norm concerning healthy lifestyle habits to a tipping point that will produce real lifestyle changes;

• the smoking rate has been stagnant for several years, and new strategies are needed to convince smokers to give up the habit and deter young Quebeckers from ever starting to smoke;

• Québec is the Canadian province with the lowest tax rate on tobacco ($29 in taxes on each carton of cigarettes, while the Canadian average is $50);

• excess sugar intake runs counter to the principles of sound nutrition and fosters the development of chronic diseases;

We, the Alliance for a Healthy Québec, are asking the Québec government to:

1. Continue and increase investments to create environments that promote healthy lifestyle habits, while encouraging Quebeckers to cut down on the consumption of products detrimental to their health:
   a. By raising the tobacco tax, which contributes to a decrease in smoking;
   b. By introducing a tax on sugary drinks, which contributes to lower sugar consumption.

2. Invest revenues in the implementation of a concerted, ambitious and galvanizing plan that targets the creation of healthy environments and the integration of healthy lifestyle habits into the living environments and daily lives of all Quebeckers.
An increase in the tobacco tax is in keeping with the World Health Organization’s recommendation – in order to be effective in combating smoking, taxes should represent 70% of the total cost of a pack of cigarettes\(^8\) – could generate funds of up to $1.8 billion over five years.

This increase would ensure that Québec nears the Canadian average on tobacco taxation.

Moreover, such a tax increase would have a significant impact on reducing the proportion of smokers, currently 19%, and would go a long way to achieving the departmental target of 12% in 2021.

The introduction of a tax on sugary drinks is in keeping with the World Health Organization’s recommendation – in order to be effective in combating obesity, taxes should represent 20% of the total cost of a sugary drink – could generate funds up to 800 million over five years.

By investing such amounts in healthy lifestyle habits, Québec would become the State that invests the most in preventive health and healthy lifestyle habits as the main driver for improving the quality of life of citizens across North America.

Show your support!

Alliance for a Healthy Québec intends to spread this message loud and clear throughout Québec.

We want to create an unprecedented movement to make Québec a place where healthy lifestyle habits are among our prevailing values.

We are calling on all organizations that would like to take part in this incredible journey to show their support, whether through press releases, opinion pieces, testimonials or other means, using traditional media, social media or their own dissemination channels.

We are calling on elected officials to make a public commitment to develop environments that promote healthy lifestyles – an essential prerequisite for quality of life – one of their priorities.

Lastly, we are calling on all citizens to demonstrate their support for this project by participating in the support campaign on social media.

- Let us form an alliance for a better quality of life.
- Let us form an alliance for a healthy Québec.
- Support the proposal of Alliance for a Healthy Québec.

PourUnQuebecEnSante.org

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\(^8\) http://www.who.int/tobacco/economics/taxation/en/
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**Name of organization:**

**Number of persons represented by the organization:**

**Authorization** I authorize the display of the organization’s name and logo on the website and in the documentation of Alliance for a Healthy Québec.

**Signature:**

**Name of representative:**

**Date:**

Return this form and a JPG file with your logo to info@pourunquebecensante.org