Ensuring healthy public policy

Health impact assessments are evidence-based, systematic examinations of the potential health impacts of government decisions. By examining any new policies, programs or services through the lens of a health impact assessment, decision-makers can be assured that the health of Canadians will not be compromised. This is what we call “healthy” public policy.

As a nation we must also address the “causes of the causes” of poor health — the social and economic factors that influence health.

**Fast facts**
Health impact assessments have been used by many countries. They serve as a tool to increase the knowledge of decision-makers about how actions in their sector might influence the health of the population. Seeing all policy through a “health lens” is very important since evidence shows that every action with a negative effect on health will incur heavier costs to society down the road. Health care alone cannot improve the health outcomes of Canadians. It accounts for only about one-quarter of health outcomes. The social determinants of health count for half of health outcomes.

According to the World Health Organization, “Economic sectors such as transport, agriculture and housing have profound impacts on health. For instance, transport is a major factor in traffic injuries, air pollution and noise. But ‘healthy transport policies’ can help reduce these risks, as well as promoting walking and cycling.”

**Canada’s health care system needs:**
- The federal government to introduce a Health Impact Assessment to ensure that the health of Canadians is a key consideration in every policy decision.

This would:
- Ensure that any potential impact on the health of Canadians is a consideration in all government decisions.
- Maximize opportunities for health benefits and minimize or mitigate any adverse consequences of government actions.

To learn more, please write to grassroots@cma.ca or call 800-663-7336 x2397