



*Presenting the
Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health*

Promoting the Campaign in Women's Health. Winter, 2001.



“MCEWH acts not only as a research institute, but as a social conscience --reminding us that as we strive for the principles of fairness, equity and justice in our communities ...as we plan to make the wisest investments for our health and the health of future generations, it is crucial that we remember to consider the ways policies and programs influence the health of men and women differently.”

*- Carol Amaratunga,
Executive Director*

The Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health: Celebrating achievements "of Excellence"

Since opening 4 years ago, the Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (MCEWH) has strived to facilitate both new and better knowledge in the domain of women's health. The ultimate goal has been the encouragement of the best policies and practices for the health and well being of women and our communities in Atlantic Canada. There are many ways in which the Centre has worked over the past to achieve its goals and many opportunities to celebrate achievements "of Excellence" in our region.

MCEWH: health is much more than a matter of medical care

At the core of the Centre's approach is the notion that health is much more than a matter of medical care: women's health involves women's emotional, social, cultural, spiritual and physical well being, and it is determined by the social, political and economic context of women's lives as well as by biology. This broad definition recognizes the validity of women's life experiences and women's own beliefs about health. This holistic approach has also ensured the "big picture" of health has been ever present in the work of the Centre.

An example of the Centre's "big picture of health" approach is the annual regional policy fora, an event which brings together over 400 people from different sectors – clinicians, politicians, government policy makers, scholars, community researchers, activists, and media – all are involved in a view of health that is determined by multiple factors.

MCEWH: an investment in women's health



In only 4 years, the MCEWH has brought more than \$6 million to the Atlantic region for women's health research initiatives. This includes the establishment of the Elizabeth May Chair for Women's Health and the Environment (\$1.7 million); the initiation of a project on women's unpaid work and well being (\$1.7 million); as well as the establishment of a secretariat on Social and Economic Inclusion (\$400,000). In addition, the Centre has applied for more than \$4 million in external grants and contracts.

MCEWH: facilitating new and better knowledge in women's health

As a result of the MCEWH's research mandate, the focus of traditional health research has been broadened to include population health determinants and community-based research. MCEWH has also enhanced the capacity of the Atlantic region to access a larger share of health research funding and has created a repository of research and resources on women's health. Over 70 women-centred research projects have been funded by the MCEWH in the Atlantic region and several other externally funded projects are managed through the Centre. Through its research activities, community capacity has been built in relation to the

One example of this facilitative role is the Centre's leadership in working with government agencies and NGO's to redirect money to the Atlantic Region for research initiatives related to the health of the immigrant and diverse women living in our region.

conducting research on women's health; many projects have come to light as a result of the Centre's involvement and support.

MCEWH: communicating information to a wide audience in a number of ways

As a result of the MCEWH's communications mandate, the profile of women's health in Atlantic Canada has been raised through a variety of means used to reach different audiences, including the general public and media. Distribution of research findings, information and outreach activities on women's health have acknowledged the importance of both academic and clear language. Dissemination and communication of information on women's health have reached a wide and diverse audience throughout the whole Atlantic region.

Examples of communications activities at the MCEWH include special publications such as the Millennium Women's Health Calendar Partnership project and the Women's Health in Atlantic Canada Trilogy; the management of several websites and electronic list serves to encourage open access to information across the region; and a series of events, including regional policy meetings, press conferences and celebrations.

One example of this capacity building role includes the Centre's work in providing support to informal groups of people to encourage to new ways of working and partnerships in women's health activities. These include support for example: the Women in Public Policy Project (WIPP), the Social and Economic Inclusion/Just Society Project, the Black Women's Health Research Group, Federation des Acadiennes de la Nouvelle Ecosse, and the Nova Scotia Caregivers Association.

MCEWH: building capacity and networking for women's health

As a result of the MCEWH's networking mandate, new and integrated ways of thinking about health have been promoted as well as new multi-disciplinary approaches to academic research. The Centre has facilitated successful collaboration with multiple sectors. The MCEWH has established credibility and capacity to convoke events and bring people together through a health determinants approach. MCEWH has also developed an Atlantic-wide constituency and has tracked information in a regional

data-base of organizations and individuals linked to women's health.

MCEWH: providing analysis, advice and information on key women's health issues

As a result of the MCEWH's policy mandate, MCEWH is seen as legitimate, professional, and relevant to the policy and research needs of decision makers in government and community. The Centre has evolved into a strategic regional/national partner, broker, and bridge institution which links science and community participation through research and policy dissemination. The Centre helps decision makers adopt new ideas and practices with respect to program planning and evaluation of gender based analysis, social and economic inclusion frameworks in policy and programs and recognize the interplay among the determinants of health.

Examples of this advisory role include: the Centre's invitation to guide a series on "Gender, Health and HIV" for the Commonwealth Secretariat in Gender and Youth Affairs Division, a publication bound for senior policy officials in all commonwealth countries; the Centre's invitation to host a session on research capacity building for the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation.

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