

Media advisory
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Poverty making us sick, raising incomes the best prescription

Poverty is making Canadians sick, robbing hundreds of thousands of their health and leading to widespread preventable illness and creating huge costs for the health care system. This is the conclusion of powerful new tipping-point research released today by the Wellesley Institute and the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto. For the first time, the study uses Canadian Community Health Survey and income files to paint the most comprehensive picture to date of our nation's health.

“High income does not guarantee good health, but low income almost inevitably ensures poor health and significant health inequity in Canada,” reports Dr. Ernie Lightman, lead researcher for the new study. Poverty is triggering a devastating health crisis among lower-income people, but the research shows that raising incomes leads to better health.

“This important new research establishes in the most complete way the strong link between low income and poor health,” says Rick Blickstead, CEO of the Wellesley Institute, which co-sponsored the study. “Prof. Lightman and his colleagues have demonstrated that health equity is truly an issue of national significance. The results confirm for the first time that relatively small increases in incomes of poor Canadians will lead to substantial increases in their health.”

Using sophisticated multivariate analysis, the researchers demonstrate that every \$1,000 increase in income leads to substantial increases in health. Prof. Lightman and his research colleagues, Andrew Mitchell and Beth Wilson, found that the poorest one-fifth of Canadians, when compared to the richest twenty percent, has: more than double the rate of diabetes and heart disease; a sixty percent greater rate of two or more chronic health conditions; more than three times the rate of bronchitis; nearly double the rate of arthritis or rheumatism.

The Wellesley Institute is a national leader in pressing for practical and effective strategies to reduce the health gaps among Canadians. “In our work at the local, provincial and national levels, we are calling on governments to take pragmatic steps to raise the incomes of the poorest people. There are a variety of policy options – income transfers, tax policies, market solutions. This research shows that the option of doing nothing is no longer viable,” says Blickstead.

The full report, plus detailed data tables, is available on-line at www.wellesleyinstitute.com

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