

Using this Presentation

- Use some or all of these slides, in any order, depending on your agenda and audience
- Notes have been included with each slide to give you further details. They also refer to the relevant sections in the kit that will help you to be even better prepared
- Good luck!

1.

Rural and Remote Women's Health in Canada

Becoming a Champion for Change

2.

Background: The Study

- "Rural, Remote and Northern Women's Health: Policy and Research Directions"
- National study sponsored by four research offices called the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health (2001-2003)
- Brought together academic and community-based researchers with rural women across the country

3. See the backgrounder section of the kit for more details

Background: The Methods

- Roundtable discussion (Fall 2001)
- Literature reviews in French and English
- 28 focus groups involving over 200 women
- Roundtable with policy makers (Winter 2002)
- National consultation (Spring 2003)
- Final report (Spring 2004)

4. What set this research apart was the involvement of rural women from all parts of the country – coast to coast to coast. Combining their expertise with that of researchers made the findings of this project particularly compelling.

The Findings: Themes

- Rural living is important to women's health
- One size does not fit all
- Rural women have been invisible to researchers and policy makers
- The health care system is in trouble
- Recent changes to the system have not helped rural women
- Poverty is a key factor in rural women's health
- Health is far more than health care

- 5.
- Living rurally does affect women's health, both positively and negatively. See message #2 for more on how.
 - Urban solutions rarely solve rural problems, and 'rural' itself is not all the same. Diversity needs to be taken into consideration, and local solutions found. Yet there are similarities in the needs reported by rural women across the country
 - The health needs of rural women have not been taken into account in decision making. This research, and this kit, are good starting points toward changing that. See message #1 for more.
 - Women throughout Canada described the health system as vulnerable and deteriorating. See message #4 of some of their ideas about what would help.
 - Recent changes and cutbacks have meant fewer services, more travel, less personalized care, more stress and more uncertainty for rural women
 - See message #3 for more on this
 - Even though rural health care is seen negatively by most women, rural health is bigger than that and is often viewed positively.

The Findings: Research Priorities

1. Make research useful
2. Involve rural women in the research process
3. Select topics of research that are relevant to rural women

6. See the backgrounder on research priorities for more details, especially regarding specific research topics that need more work.

The Findings: Policy Agenda

1. Factor gender, place and culture into all health policy
2. Define health policy as more than health care services
3. Improve health by improving access to more than services

7.

Specific actions under each recommendation:

- Use a rural lens and a gender lens, in locally-sensitive ways, to ensure that all health policy decisions take rural women into account.
- Pay attention to poverty and to community infrastructure – there are many more ways to invest in health beyond hiring more doctors.
- Not just to services, but to information, to appropriate care and to decision making. See the backgrounder on the policy findings for more details here.

Getting Involved

1. Be a champion for change in your community
2. Changing research: Making information useful
3. Changing policy: Having a say in health decisions

8. This introduces the section on specific ways to get involved in making changes in rural women's health in your community.

Be a Champion for Change

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead

Being a Champion for Change

You need:

- Passion
- A clear message
- People who share your concern
- An audience who can do something about it

10. More details on this are available in the kit.

How to be Heard

- Talk to your friends
- Figure out who can make the difference you are looking for
- What will make that person pay attention?
- Contact that person
- Bring others along
- Maintain ongoing contact
- Use every opportunity

- 11.**
- You never know who might be able to help you get your message heard. Talk about it whenever you can, to whomever you can.
 - There is no point in contacting the Prime Minister about a change that is needed locally. Be sure to target your message at the right people
 - What does that decision maker care about? What would be the best way to make contact? If you can get a face-to-face meeting, do so.
 - Be persistent!
 - There is strength in numbers
 - Find reasons to maintain contact with that decision maker, maybe by sending a thank you letter or forwarding new information about the issue as you receive it.

Changing Research: Making Information Useful

- There is still much to learn about rural women's health in Canada
- Good information can lead to better policy
- Research should be practical and should involve the people most affected by it
- Research isn't just for university professors – anyone can be involved in doing research, or in influencing what kind of research gets done

12.

- Sometimes how research gets done is as important as what it uncovers – rural women need to be involved in research that affects them
- There are lots of organizations interested in community-based research – see the page in the kit on research, and get in touch with some of them
- There is still more to learn, even though often what is needed is not more information, but more action based on the information we already have!
- Decision makers want “evidence-based” health policy

Changing Policy: Having a Say in Health Decisions

- Policy is about allocating scarce resources among competing priorities
- Health policy is shaped in lots of places by lots of people, anytime resource allocation decisions are made
- Ordinary people can be involved in changing the direction of health policy
- Give decision makers your feedback – help them to keep rural women's health issues on their radar

13.

The main message here is that although it takes persistence, anyone can be involved in influencing how health decisions are made. We need to make sure that rural women's health issues stay on the radar of health policy makers. Women can do that by providing input and feedback – what is and is not working for them about the way current decisions have been made, and what would make things better. More details are available in the kit.

Four Key Messages

1. Pay attention to rural women
2. Living rurally affects health
3. Alleviate poverty to improve health
4. There are creative solutions to rural health challenges

14. Stress here that these messages came directly from women in Canada living in rural, remote and northern areas.

Pay Attention to Rural Women

- Why?
 - Women are more than a “special interest group”
 - Gender affects health and needs to be taken into account
 - Women have valuable insight that decision makers need

15.

- Women are more than half of the population of rural Canada. We are the majority of health care users and health care providers. We deserve to be heard.
- Physiologically, some health concerns affect only women (e.g. pregnancy; cervical cancer); some affect more women (e.g. osteoporosis, eating disorders); some affect women differently than men (e.g. heart disease, HIV/AIDS). Socially, women’s caregiving responsibilities, financial dependence, susceptibility to violence, access to social support etc. mean that women always experience health differently than men. These differences are significant. Studies that look only at men and assume to speak for everyone will inevitably miss women’s experiences.
- Rural women know what will and won’t work in their contexts. They can help decision makers design policies that will be effective. Their voices need to be heard. Sometimes that requires that decision makers make it easier for rural women to participate, by making the process more transparent and/or by paying for women’s time, transportation and childcare to be there. It will be worth the investment.

What Can Be Done?

- Encourage decision makers to:
 - Ask, “What might a rural women think of this decision?”
 - Use rural and gender lenses in evaluating policy decisions
 - Make it possible for rural women to participate in policy input and decision making processes

16.

See the kit for resources that provide these lenses, and for tips regarding who to talk to about what and how to conduct effective meetings.

Living Rurally Affects Health

- How?
 - *Physical factors* such as distance, weather, and rural job hazards
 - *Social factors* such as a lack of anonymity coupled with social isolation
 - *Infrastructural factors* such as poor access to transportation, health care services, childcare, job opportunities, nutritious food etc.

17.

- Health is determined by far more than health care. Other economic, social, physical, infrastructural and personal factors play an important role. Living rurally can be a determinant of health in important ways.
- Physical factors
- Distance: have to drive to get anywhere. Gas and parking are expensive. Taking a whole day to get to a ten-minute appointment may not be worth the effort.
- Weather: winter driving, ice roads, seasonal work all affect health care access
- Job hazards: farming, fishing and mining pose health risks that are specific to rural populations
- Social factors
- “everybody knows everybody” – can be supportive or intrusive, and makes maintaining confidentiality in health care difficult
- Isolation – more limited social networks, less access to health information
- Infrastructure
- Less rural access to affordable transportation, childcare, nutritious food
- Fewer services including health care, recreation, support groups etc.

“When policies are touted as ‘place and gender neutral’, decisions that are likely to favour urban, male stakeholders get made.”

18.

What Can Be Done?

- Ask decision makers to consider the full range of positive and negative impacts their decisions could have on rural women
 - For example, does this decision take into account the need for confidentiality in rural places? What about the lack of affordable transportation or childcare? Does it pay attention to the seasonality of rural life?

19.

Improving Health Means Alleviating Poverty

- Poverty plays the biggest role in determining the health of rural women, even in the context of Canada's publicly funded health care system
 - Low incomes, fewer job opportunities
 - Lots of hidden or indirect costs to obtain health care, such as gas, time off work, parking, meals, childcare, prescription drugs etc.
- To improve health, address poverty first

20.

- A publicly funded health care system alone is not enough to ensure that rural women have full access to care.
- Rural women tend to be economically vulnerable. This is linked to low education levels, fewer job opportunities, unpaid caregiving responsibilities, lower wages, and vulnerable rural economies.
- Health care access is dependent on having access to money to pay for things like gas, parking, childcare, time off work, prescription drugs, meals, glasses, dental visits etc.
- Lacking money not only means that access to care is compromised, but it also increases stress, results in substandard housing and leads to other negative ripple effects that undermine women's health
- If decision makers want to make a difference to rural women's health, they need to address poverty.

“Women's lives are not sorted into discrete compartments that can be dealt with independently by different government departments.”

21.

“It’s time for health policy to reflect health research: economic and social investments are themselves investments in the health of Canadians.”

22.

What Can Be Done?

- Look past doctors and the Ministry of Health for solutions to rural health care problems
- Remember that there are many possible interventions that will help
 - Jobs, childcare, transportation, support groups all improve women’s health
- Ensure *local* access to services

23.

Creative Solutions to Rural Women's Health Challenges

- What will help?
 - Hire more health professionals
 - Not just doctors
 - Deliver care appropriately for rural contexts
 - Make it local and share the load
 - Invest in community infrastructure
 - Playgroups, community kitchens, Internet access etc.

24.

- It's true that there are many challenges to improving health for rural and remote women in Canada. The good news is that because so many factors affect women's health, there are many ways to intervene to make improvements! Women themselves have lots of good ideas about what would help. Here are some of them:
- Hire more health professionals
- Counsellors, lactation consultants, public health nurses, social workers etc., in addition to doctors, are needed in rural areas. Especially when doctors are difficult to find, increasing the supply of other health care workers would make a big difference to women's lives.
- Deliver care in ways that suit rural realities
- If a rural woman can't get to the care, she can't access it. Lots of rural women do not have transportation during the day, or do not consider it worth the inconvenience to go out of town for care. Bring the care to them, by designing care that is local or mobile.
- Rural health practitioners are overworked. More effective sharing of responsibilities would help to ease the load on everyone. For example, obstetricians, family doctors and midwives could perhaps collaborate more effectively to provide local maternity care for rural women in Canada.
- Community infrastructure
- Because women's health is a product of many different factors, we should not underestimate the health benefits of support services such as playgroups, community kitchens, job training programs, recreational facilities, information-gathering points and Internet access. Investing in these is investing in health.

“It’s a lot easier to bring one or two people to a hundred than it is to send the hundred to two people.”

25. This quotation came from a study participant in Newfoundland and Labrador

Tips and Tools for Communicating these Messages

1. Generating Positive Media Attention
2. Conducting Persuasive Meetings
3. Making Great Presentations
4. Writing Effective Letters

26.

Generating Positive Media Attention

Using the media is a great way to get your message out to a lot of people. How?

- Catch their attention with interesting stories
- Be an ongoing information resource
- Return media calls promptly
- Use lots of different ways to make contact
 - letters to the editor, press releases, interviews, articles, public meetings etc.

27. See the page in the kit called “Positive Media Attention” for more details and ideas

Conducting Persuasive Meetings

Meeting someone in person is often the most effective way of getting your message heard.

- Be persistent in asking for a meeting
- Be well prepared
- Be confident
- Offer helpful information
- Be clear about what you are asking for
- Follow up

28. See the section in the kit on conducting persuasive meetings for more details about how to do this well.

Making Great Presentations

- Public speaking can be scary, but think of it as an opportunity to get other people excited about rural women's health
- Be well prepared
 - Know your audience
 - Know your material
 - Be yourself
 - Practice, practice, practice!

29. See the section in the kit entitled "Making Great Presentations" for lots of tips and ideas about how to prepare.

Writing Effective Letters

Letters get read when they are:

- Short and simple
- Sent to the right people
- Personal
- Handwritten
- Focused
- Persistent

30.

- When you write a letter, be clear about what you are asking for. Ask for a response.
- Get your friends to write too. There is strength in numbers, and the more people that write, the more likely the recipient is to pay attention.
- Consider following up your letter with a telephone call.
- Remember: letters to federal politicians do not require postage!
- See the letter-writing section of the kit for more tips and ideas