

Healthy Villages

A guide for communities and community health workers

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Foreword

Document aims and target audience

This guide was developed to support the Healthy Villages approach for improving the health of rural communities. It provides local community leaders with a model of the type of information they may need to consider in their roles as current or prospective managers of a Healthy Villages project. Community leaders include not only elected officials, but also the health staff, respected elders and others who work to improve the health of rural communities. We outline the type of information that Healthy Villages managers could provide to their communities, as well as the basis for developing material that is specific to regions or to entire countries. Because this guide was designed to be used in many different countries, it is likely that modifications will be required at local levels to ensure that local conditions and practices are taken into account.

It is recognized that many excellent locally-developed solutions for village health problems are already being practised. This guide is not intended as a global prescription for promoting improved health in rural communities, but rather as source material from which readers can develop local solutions to local problems. The purpose of this guide, therefore, is to provide a model of the type of information and approaches for promoting healthier villages that readers can use when implementing village-level activities.

The Healthy Villages project

Many countries are developing stronger partnerships between the health sector and local government organizations to promote local “settings” initiatives for health. A Healthy Villages project assists in this by putting concepts such as hygiene education, environmental health, health promotion and environmental protection into action in rural communities. A Healthy Villages project enables a village to mobilize the human and financial resources needed to address many health and quality-of-life issues. The process works

as a communication strategy that develops political and popular health awareness and support for health issues.

Settings are major social structures that provide ways of reaching defined populations. Each setting in a village has a unique set of members, authorities, rules and participating organizations, each with interests in different aspects of the village life. For example, work settings include agriculture and small-scale industry; other settings include the food-market, the housing setting or the school setting. Generally, these structures are organized for purposes other than health. Interactions are frequent and sustained in these settings and are characterized by patterns of formal and informal membership and communication. These qualities create efficiencies in time and resources for health education programming, and offer more access and greater potential for social influence.

Villages are often defined in terms of arbitrary administrative definitions. A village may be a small group of people living in a settlement who practise subsistence agriculture, with no specialization or division of labour, and who are isolated from national development agencies. A village may also be a large and differentiated conurbation where some people work in agriculture, some work in small-scale industries and others provide education, health care, administration and a variety of services. This guide is directed towards the larger and more differentiated village. It is also recognized that many villages do not operate independently from cities, in that cities require sustained interaction with rural communities for their food and natural resources (including land for waste disposal). Often, too, the district agencies that set policy and administer the villages are located in cities. Under these circumstances, a Healthy Villages programme has a greater chance of success if the linked city is participating in a similar type of programme for cities—a Healthy Cities Programme¹—and if the district-level staff implement Healthy Villages as part of the health policy for all the towns and villages in the district.

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