

Outreach for the Air Quality Health Index  
and the 20/20 The Way to Clean Air Campaign  
to First Nations Community Members  
with Asthma and Associated Allergies residing in Toronto



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# Table of Contents

## Contents

Project Background.....	4
Project Description and Implementation .....	6
Project Goals and Objectives .....	6
Project Activities .....	6
Ongoing activities on the AQHI and the 20/20 Way to Clean Air campaign.....	7
Disseminate the AQHI and 20/20 Way to Clean Air Campaign information through Indigenous Media .....	10
Organize educational sessions on the AQHI and 20/20 The Way to Clean Air Campaign through local radio stations .....	10
Recruit and train community leaders and members to disseminate AQHI-related information to their peers.....	11
Summary of Results .....	11
Lessons Learned and Recommendations.....	13
List of Appendices .....	14
References .....	15

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## Project Background

### *The role of the Asthma Society in promoting the AQHI and the 20/20 The Way To Clean Air Campaign*

The Asthma Society of Canada (ASC) is committed to helping asthma patients live symptom free lives, and therefore recognizes the vital importance of clean air and a healthy environment. Numerous studies from Canada and around the world suggests that air pollution is a key trigger for the exacerbation of asthma and higher levels of air pollution result in a rapid increase in the number of hospitalizations due to asthma.<sup>i,ii,iii,iv,v,vi,vii,viii</sup> According to Health Canada, thousands of premature deaths and hospitalizations can be linked to air pollution each year. Those most at risk of health problems from poor air quality include: children, seniors and people with pre-existing respiratory and cardiac conditions. Air pollution worsens asthma, allergies, bronchitis and heart problems. As well, it irritates the eyes, nose and throat, and makes it difficult for even healthy lungs to work well. The public needs an accurate warning system so that they can take action to protect them from air pollution.

In response to this, Environment Canada and Health Canada led the development of a health-based air quality index, known as the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI). The AQHI incorporates the most recent scientific information on the health effects of key air pollutants – ground level ozone, particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide. It measures local air pollution and reports the health risk on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 representing the lowest risk to health. While the AQHI helps protect people from air pollution, Toronto Public Health (TPH) created a social marketing campaign to reduce air pollution. Entitled 20/20 The Way to Clean Air<sup>ix</sup>, this campaign is designed, among other things, to help individuals reduce both home energy use and vehicle use by 20%.

There are a variety of programs and services provided by the ASC geared towards people with asthma and associated allergies and their families through direct outreach as well as working with community-based healthcare professionals. Specifically, the ASC has identified First Nations communities as target groups that should be further reached in providing information on asthma and air quality. The ASC has a special interest in working with Aboriginal communities and helping these communities understand asthma and how to manage it properly. First Nations communities have a noticeably higher prevalence of asthma compared with the general Canadian population which shows an important need for ongoing support and education. This may be because of this groups' exposure to various environmental determinants of respiratory health such as: smoking, poor housing, wood burning, and poor indoor/outdoor air quality. The ASC has recently completed two major projects in partnership with the Public Health Agency of Canada and the First Nations Inuit Health Branch to develop and adapt materials relating to air quality and respiratory health with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Some of the materials adapted were included in the outreach packages for the current project with Toronto Public Health.

### *History of Asthma Society partnership with Toronto Public Health and the 20/20 Way To Clean Air Campaign*

This project is the 3<sup>rd</sup> partnership between Toronto Public Health 20/20 Clean Air Campaign and the Asthma Society of Canada. Phase II built on the recommendations of Phase I and subsequently the current project is a cumulative result of recommendations from both Phase I and II. Reviewing the key recommendations and lessons learned from the previous projects helped shape the exact nature of the activities and implementation of the current project.

Phase I - October 2010 – Outreach for the Air Quality Health Index and the 20/20 The Way to Clean Air Campaign to people with asthma and associated allergies residing in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area.

Overall the main goal of this initial project was to increase the number of residents and community organizations of Toronto and the GTA receiving information on the AQHI and the 20/20 The Way to Clean Air Campaign. Furthermore, the project was aimed at designing, conducting and evaluating the AQHI and the 20/20 campaign outreach activities to people with asthma and associated allergies residing in Toronto and the GTA.

Key Results:

- Significant reach of information about the AQHI and 20/20 campaign throughout Toronto and the GTA
- Incorporation of AQHI and the 20/20 campaign components into ASC programming and activities
- Development of an online survey around AQHI and 20/20 campaign awareness levels to establish a baseline

Key Recommendations:

- Place more attention on the 20/20 campaign in ongoing and future outreach initiatives within the Toronto and the GTA
- Target new groups of people (e.g. age, cultures)
- Continue promoting the AQHI and 20/20 campaign through Toronto Public Health partner organizations
- Undertake a grassroots movement to further distribute the main messages and information

Phase II – June 2011 – Outreach for the Air Quality Health Index and the 20/20 The Way to Clean Air Campaign to First Nations people and Chinese-Canadian community members with asthma and associated allergies residing in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area.

The main goal of Phase II was to build on the recommendations of Phase I by targeting specific cultural communities, specifically increasing the number of First Nations and Chinese-Canadian residents, media and organizations based in Toronto and the GTA who receive information on the AQHI and the 20/20 The Way to Clean Air Campaign.

Key Results:

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Outreach for the Air Quality Health Index and the 20/20 The Way to Clean Air Campaign to First Nations Community Members with Asthma and Associated Allergies residing in Toronto (September 2012)

- Significant distribution of AQHI and 20/20 campaign awareness materials and information into First Nation and Chinese communities as well as the general population within Toronto and the GTA
- Further incorporation of AQHI and 20/20 campaign components into ASC programming
- Developed an online survey specifically designed for First Nations community members to better understand their preferences of learning about the AQHI.

## Project Description and Implementation

### Project Goals and Objectives

The main goal for this project was to increase the number of First Nations community members directly and indirectly affected by asthma and associated allergies, the media and community/health care-related organizations based in Toronto that are aware of, and understand how to use, the AQHI and the 20/20 The Way to Clean Air Campaign. The key objectives of this project were as follows:

- 1) Organize outreach activities and promote the AQHI and the 20/20 The Way to Clean Air Campaign during the spring and summer of 2012 using existing ASC resource and outreach programs;
- 2) Reach a minimum of 500 First Nations community members including those with asthma and associated allergies and their caregivers by conducting educational events (workshops/presentations) and recruiting Asthma Ambassadors and/or NAPA members within First Nations populations in Toronto;
- 3) Foster long-term, sustainable information dissemination to First Nations community members affected by asthma and associated allergies and their caregivers past the completion of this project through BREATHE (Building Respiratory Health Education and Awareness for First Nations, Inuit and Métis: Tools for Health Empowerment), the newly established on-line Clearing House of the Asthma Society of Canada;
- 4) Evaluate the success of the approach or outreach event(s) at the completion of this project.

### Project Activities

As previously discussed, the current project builds on the lessons learned from the previous phases, leveraging not only the impact of successive years of marketing into both the mainstream but also into First Nations specific media and community networks. Due to a medical leave by the project lead the project start was delayed as new staff was hired and internal resources allocated to accommodate. Despite the delay, the core objectives were completed within the official deadline of this project with the added benefit of overlapping into the “September Peak” asthma awareness campaign as well as being included into the dissemination strategy of new First Nations specific material aimed at awareness of asthma triggers.

The designing and adapting of specific implementation methods of the key activities identified in this project was done through a lens of achieving the greatest impact and the results of key findings from the survey designed in Phase II and completed in the succeeding months:

- All survey respondents spoke English, with the majority able to read (?) and speak English.
- All survey respondents lived in the City of Toronto and resided off-reserve (ie. within the general “mainstream” population)
- Asthma was one of the top 4 health concerns of respondents with nearly half indicating they had a friend or colleague with asthma
- Of the 49% of respondents who had heard of the AQHI, over 40% learned of it online, and 20% through the Asthma Society of Canada
- Over half of respondents indicated they would like to receive information through local sources

Based on these findings, and the lessons learned from previous projects, activities centred on leveraging past engagement efforts with targeted First Nations organizations, broadening the scope into First Nations media and building broad community exposure of air quality, the AQHI and the 20/20 Way to Clean Air campaign into ASC programming within Toronto and the GTA.

### **Ongoing activities on the AQHI and the 20/20 Way to Clean Air campaign**

- a) Promote and disseminate the AQHI and outdoor air quality Fact Sheet to First Nations people

The ASC utilized a multi-pronged and targeted approach for promoting and dissemination of air quality materials by working to engage First Nations organizations indirectly through email and mail correspondence as well as meeting in person with selected organizations to develop a more in-depth engagement.

#### **Development of the targeted list**

An environmental scan was conducted to establish a list of potential organizations in Toronto and the GTA. Organizations on this master list were then contacted via telephone and email to determine interest in participating in this project. The sources of this scan included:

- Past Toronto Public Health Projects
- Past First Nations projects conducted by the ASC
- Internet search of First Nations in Toronto and area

#### **Engagement of participating First Nations organizations**

Once a list of participating organizations was developed, packages were developed using a variety of Asthma Society resources (both general and First Nations specific) addressing asthma, air quality and the 20/20 campaign. These packages were then sent to 32 of the 37 organizations along with an introduction letter and order form.

An additional 5 organizations were chosen for in-person engagement. These organizations were chosen based on proximity and diversity of programming and therefore access to First Nations living in the downtown core of Toronto.

- Toronto Aboriginal Care Team

- George Brown College Native Aboriginal Services
- Anishnawbe Health Toronto
- Sherbourne Health Centre
- Ryerson University Aboriginal Student Services

Although there was limited success in securing formal interviews and meetings with any of the organizations, casual engagement revealed limited capacity but some genuine interest in prioritizing air quality in the list of health priorities of their clients. All were open to placing pamphlets and brochures and possibly including material in onsite packages to their clients, but there was no interest in anything more comprehensive at this time. Most felt that they either didn't have the capacity in terms of staff, technology or logistics, to host workshop, post videos or disseminate beyond their lobby.

All organizations were sent a secondary email, confirming receipt of the packages and inquiring if there were any questions or interest in receiving more material. Out of the 37 organizations, 10 responded, indicating they received the material but, like those organizations personally engaged, showed little interest in a more in-depth involvement beyond receiving material to post in their lobby and/or client information packages.

In late August, the ASC received printed copies of a new resource developed through another project. This asthma triggers workbook, specifically designed by and for First Nations, was used as a pretext for a final engagement with the organizations. One copy was sent along with a letter and another copy of the resource order sheet, to each of the 37 organizations.

- b) Continue including AQHI and 20/20 materials into ASC programs and outreach activities.

The ASC, as part of its ongoing outreach and dissemination of asthma and associated allergy related activities, engages in several forms of engagement with the general public. As a result of this and past projects, resources focusing on AQHI, 20/20 and First Nations-focused are a part of the materials used in the various outreach and dissemination activities of the ASC.

### **Website**

As part of the ongoing programming of the ASC, information on the AQHI has been updated on the website. This page includes a quiz, links to digital stories, an online discussion blog, audio blog, and several useful links including to the 20/20 Campaign.

[www.asthma.ca/aqhi](http://www.asthma.ca/aqhi) - 853 page views

### **Asthma Widget**

A new tool recently developed is the "Asthma Widget". The updated AsthmaToday Widget runs on your computer and provides you with your current weather and upcoming forecast, humidity levels, and now provides you with your local Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) reading. The Widget also provides the latest asthma news and helpful links from the Asthma Society.

- [www.asthma.ca/widget](http://www.asthma.ca/widget) - 925 page views

### **National Asthma Patient Alliance – Asthma Ambassadors program**

A growing amount of research has shown that community-based, peer-to-peer support plays a critical role in chronic disease management. Many people with asthma are symptom-free due to proper care and management, and those suffering from poorly controlled asthma are unable to identify people who may be able to offer them support. Furthermore, many people with recurring (even daily) symptoms mistakenly believe that they have done “all they can do”, without realizing it may be possible to live symptom-free. These individuals are unlikely to search for information unless it is provided by a direct contact. Asthma Ambassadors have received extra training and information to help them provide asthma information to their friends and their communities.

Asthma Ambassadors are a volunteer team of Canadians who have committed to providing peer-to-peer support around asthma for friends, family, co-workers, and others in their community whom they interact with on a regular basis. Asthma Ambassadors are provided with training, support and resources from the Asthma Society of Canada and access to Certified Asthma/Respiratory Educators. The program does not request Ambassadors to identify race or culture. The ASC gave out 30 Asthma Ambassador Kits in Ontario, 20 of which were in the GTA, from May to August, each of which included information on the AQHI and air quality.

### **Social Media**

The ASC employs a Twitter account and a Facebook account for communication with individuals through social media networks. Both of these networks are regularly updated by the ASC staff to provide the most up-to-date information on asthma, associated allergies and air quality.

- Facebook “likes” – 1371
- Twitter Followers – 3657
- Posts/Tweets related to AQHI – 21 posts/tweets

### **Info-fairs**

- Bell Health Fair (May 9 & 11) Asthma Society had an information booth
- Respiratory health workshop at Eva’s Phoenix (Jul 24) One of the Asthma Society’s Certified Asthma Educators delivered a presentation

### **Asthma and Allergy Education and Support Program (Telephone and email education and counseling)**

This service provides over the phone and e-mail education and counseling for those who call our toll free phone number or e-mail the ASC asking for information about their condition.

- Staffed by Certified Asthma Educators/Certified Respiratory Educators (CAEs/CREs) who provide over the phone or e-mail interactive support and education
- Based on area code phone number identification (416, 647, 905 or 289), our CAEs/CREs deliver AQHI and 20/20 campaign information when they are answering inquiries from individuals residing in the GTA
- From May – August the program engaged 70 contacts via telephone and 76 contacts via email

## **Disseminate the AQHI and 20/20 Way to Clean Air Campaign information through Indigenous Media**

**Print:** An attempt to contact the largest print media, Turtle Island News, was unsuccessful after several attempts over 4 weeks between July and August. Similarly some groups were asked about the possibility of putting articles and/or advertisements into their community newsletters, however there was no interest as most organizations either did not have a newsletter or were not producing one during the summer.

**Radio:** The ASC has attempted to get in contact with a few radio stations, such as Aboriginal Voices and CUIT FM on the Indigenous Wave Show. However, the radio stations were unreachable over both telephone and e-mail.

**Online:** Despite not securing First Nations specific print or radio media for advertisements, the online advertisement of the Asthma Widget, directing people to the appropriate webpage had a wide reach and depth. An online advertisement was placed in mid-August (running through mid-September to coincide with September Peak campaign) with the popular online indigenous: *mediaINDIGENA*.

- Annual page views (unique visitors): 60,000+
- Main reach: Canada (top 3 cities: Toronto, Ottawa, Winnipeg), majority Aboriginal readership
- Readers representing the following influential sectors: Government, Academia, Business, Media
- International Reach: 119 Countries

## **Organize educational sessions on the AQHI and 20/20 The Way to Clean Air Campaign through local radio stations**

As noted above, attempts to contact First Nations radio stations were unsuccessful. As an alternative, focus was given to inquiring about targeted awareness with organizations, but as noted earlier there was little interest due to capacity and multiple and more pressing health and social issues of their constituents.

Media presence of the Asthma Society talking about air quality and respiratory health

In order to leverage the previous and simultaneous outreach efforts, mainstream media was engaged, raising awareness among everyone in Toronto and the GTA. The following is a listing of media coverage on the AQHI and/or the effects of air quality on respiratory health and asthma:

- May 9 – Weather Channel
- June 11 – Global News Toronto
- June 12 – Sun News
- June 20 – Global National
- All stories above dealt with smog, asthma, allergies and AQHI

## Recruit and train community leaders and members to disseminate AQHI-related information to their peers

Develop a webinar session on the AQHI for First Nations people

Develop and implement a peer-to-peer support program for First Nations people

Attempts to connect through local organizations to establish a base of peer mentors has not yet been unsuccessful. Capacity within organizations that we approached and their current program priorities has not yet enabled the kind of partnership necessary to develop such a tool and a program with integrity and buy-in from First Nations communities. As such, ASC staff resources required to develop a webinar and peer mentoring program were redirected into other activities such as direct meetings with 5 organizations, incorporating the AQHI and 20/20 Way to Clean Air campaign into the National Asthma Patient Alliance material and into the outreach activities targeting the general community.

BREATHE website

The BREATHE website was part of a pilot project funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada. Funding for the completion of this site has not been secured and as such the BREATHE website is not yet accessible to the public. As mentioned earlier, material and web-links to the AQHI and 20/20 Way to Clean Air campaign is available on the ASC website.

## Summary of Results

**Objective:** Organize outreach activities and promote the AQHI and the 20/20 Way to Clean Air Campaign during the spring and summer of 2012 using existing ASC resource and outreach programs;

**Result:**

AQHI and 20/20 The Way to Clean Air Campaign materials were incorporated into materials distributed at information tables attended by Certified Asthma/Respiratory Educators in the GTA.

AQHI information was incorporated into available information on the Asthma and Allergy Education and Support Program (telephone support line).

AQHI, air quality and respiratory health information and/or the 20/20 Way to Clean Air material was distributed through the Asthma Ambassador Program (20 kits in the GTA, 10 more in London ON)

**Objective:** Reach a minimum of 500 First Nations community members including those with asthma and associated allergies and their caregivers by conducting educational events (workshops/presentations) and recruiting Asthma Ambassadors and/or NAPA members within First Nations populations in Toronto;

**Result:**

A First Nations-specific Resource Request Form was developed and distributed to 37 First Nations organizations in Toronto and the GTA. These organizations encompass a diverse set of services, target

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groups and regions, building on each other and the general programming and awareness of Toronto Public Health, the AQHI and the ASC. In person contact was made with a select group, and follow up emails and telephone calls were attempted for all organizations.

Despite the challenges (principally the difficulty in engaging First Nations organizations and media and in securing interest in workshops) the project was able to provide information and awareness of the AQHI and 20/20 campaign to a significant number of citizens in Toronto and the GTA, many of whom identify as First Nations. This was done through several media engagements, incorporation of AQHI and the 20/20 Way to Clean Air campaign in information kits and at information fairs.

An online ad with a link directing viewers to the AQHI webpage is live from mid-August through to mid-September (logistics caused the ad to be placed later than expected, but will coincide with the September Peak campaign, leveraging the investment and further linking air quality with the higher rates of asthma attacks in September). The reach of the ad is an estimated 60,000 among Toronto, Ottawa and Winnipeg.

**Objective:** Foster long-term, sustainable information dissemination to First Nations community members affected by asthma and associated allergies and their caregivers past the completion of this project through BREATHE (Building Respiratory Health Education and Awareness for First Nations, Inuit and Métis: Tools for Health Empowerment), the newly established Clearing House of the Asthma Society of Canada;

**Result:**

The BREATHE website was part of a pilot project funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada. Funding for the completion of this site has not been secured and as such the BREATHE website is not accessible to the public. As mentioned earlier, material and web-links to the AQHI and 20/20 Way to Clean Air campaign is available on the ASC website. Also, as noted earlier, while the BREATHE website is not yet accessible, this has been mitigated through adapting the Resource Request Form into a First Nations specific form for First Nations Organizations, as well as adapting the ASC website.

**Objective:** Evaluate the success of the approach or outreach event(s) at the completion of this project.

**Result:**

Overall the project was a success given the limited budget and capacity of the First Nations organizations. 37 First Nations organizations received packages with a collection general and First Nations-specific material providing information about asthma, AQHI and 20/20 Way to Clean Air campaign.

Specific distribution of materials and resources:

20/20 Way to Clean Air campaign material:

- 20/20 postcards – approximately 400 distributed
- 20/20 Planner booklet – approximately 100 distributed

#### Air Quality & First Nations-specific material

- AQHI Toolkit (DVD) – approximately 37 distributed
- AQHI fact sheet (First Nations specific) – approximately 400 distributed
- AQHI Wheel – approximately 80 distributed
- AQHI Brochure – approximately 400 distributed
- Walking A Good Walk with Asthma workbook (First Nations specific) – 37 distributed

#### Asthma material

- Respiratory Health and Poor Outdoor Air Quality Poster – approximately 100 distributed
- Breathe brochure (Asthma Action Plan) – approximately 400 distributed
- Asthma Patient Bill of Rights poster – 37 distributed
- Preventing September Peak – approximately 400 distributed
- Asthma, Allergies and Anaphylaxis Poster – approximately 200 distributed
- Allergy and Asthma Education and Support Program Post Card – approximately 400 distributed
- Asthma Widget Post Card – approximately 400 distributed

#### Online advertising for Asthma Widget (Air quality and respiratory health) - *mediaINDIGENA*.

- Annual page views (unique visitors): 60,000+
- Main reach: Canada (top 3 cities: Toronto, Ottawa, Winnipeg), majority Aboriginal readership.
- Readers representing the following influential sectors: Government, Academia, Business, Media.
- International Reach: 119 Countries

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

First Nations people living in Toronto and the GTA face a number of socio-economic and urban living challenges. Air quality is one of many social and health issues and while important, it does not seem yet to be considered as high a priority. A greater investment in both funding and length of project would be required to achieve significant results.

Future projects on the 20/20 Way to Clean Air or air quality in general for First Nations people living in Toronto and the GTA would have to include ongoing targeted programming and in-depth meaningful partnerships with First Nations organizations, integration into existing health care and social outreach initiatives and programming within these organizations and start with an environmental scan of existing capacity to partner in implementation.

Integration of First Nations imagery and messaging into overall awareness and outreach programming may have more effect as many First Nations organizations servicing urban First Nations people don't have the capacity to move beyond their primary mandate (housing, primary and secondary health referral, social integration and support etc.)

## List of Appendices

1. List of First Nations Organizations in Toronto and the GTA contacted
2. Communications
  - a. Text of introductory email and telephone message
  - b. Letter accompanying Outreach Package
  - c. Follow up Letter
3. Resource Request Form
4. Materials in package
  - a. Brochures (Breathe Asthma Action Plan, September Peak)
  - b. Walking A Good Walk with Asthma (First Nations specific asthma resource)
  - c. Asthma Society resource booklets
  - d. Asthma, Allergies and Anaphylaxis First Nations specific chart
  - e. Asthma Society Air Quality poster (First Nations specific)
  - f. Asthma Society AQHI poster (First Nations specific)
  - g. Asthms Society AQHI assessment wheel
  - h. Asthma SocietyAQHI `Widget` and Planning Your Activities postcards
  - i. Toronto Public Health video kit
  - j. Toronto Public Health 20|20 material (postcards, Brochure, Planner)
  - k. Asthma Patient Bill of Rights poster & brochure
  - l. National Asthma Patient Alliance postcard
  - m. Allergy and Asthma Postcard
5. Screen shots of online promotion
  - a. Media Indegenia online advertisement
  - b. Asthma `Widget` webpage on Asthma Society website
  - c. Asthma Society Air Quality Index webpage on Asthma Society website
  - d. Copy of Twitter feed relating to the 20|20 program and AQHI

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