WHAT IS HEALTH PROMOTION?

Health promotion aims to achieve better health for everyone. It is the process of preventing ill health and advancing the health of individuals and the community through planned interventions.

The World Health Organization defines health promotion as ‘the process of enabling people to increase control over their health and improve their health’. This definition underpins a global approach to health promotion initiated by the World Health Organization. In 1986 this definition was incorporated in a document known as the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion that was developed as part of the first International Conference for Health Promotion.

The Ottawa Charter outlines essential actions for effective health promotion and is based on the understanding that health is socially determined. It recognises the importance of a broad range of approaches to health promotion that assist people to gain greater control over their health and improve their health outcomes. These approaches need to:

- focus on the prevention of ill health, not just on treating illness
- provide resources and opportunities for individuals and groups to achieve positive health
- include school and community health education
- include resources to support healthy living and working environments
- ideally, provide equal access to health and physical activity resources for everyone
- include legislation, policies and economic conditions to protect people from harm.

Health promotion therefore is more than teaching students the importance of good health or promoting lifestyle behaviours that reduce the chance of diseases developing in later life. It involves:

- recognising the social, economic, behavioural, environmental and lifestyle factors that contribute to the lifestyle-related health problems that are currently prevalent
- seeking to address these factors in order to support behavioural change.

Without the provision of systems that help create supportive environments and promote improvements in people’s health behaviours, significant improvements in the health of individuals and populations will not occur. The following summary lists the environmental and educational support systems that enable supportive environments to be created.

1. **Government legislation.** Some laws guard our health and well-being. For example, laws about the wearing of seatbelts and drink driving limit the number and severity of road crashes.

2. **Government regulations.** These controls ensure that communities maintain certain standards in health practices. For example, regulations on the information that must be provided on food labels ensure consumers are well informed.

3. **Physical supports.** These include the provision of hospitals, nursing homes, surgeries and community health centres.

4. **Economic supports.** Governments must allocate sufficient money to support health and welfare programs and enable them to function effectively.

5. **Social supports.** These include health personnel and community groups who are trained and equipped to assist in health care, such as doctors, nurses, counsellors, support groups and social workers.

6. **Educational supports.** These include traditional health education programs in schools, as well as information, education and advice provided in other settings; for example, community education via the Quit website.

A combination of these support systems, rather than any single factor such as advertising, is most effective in bringing about behavioural changes needed to improve our health.
**Figure 3.1:** Health promotion aims not only to improve people's attitudes to their health, but also to ensure the support and resources are available in their community and environment to help them maintain good health throughout their lives.

Research has also shown that effective health promotion must involve the community at all levels. People must feel that they are a part of the system, and that an improvement in their attitudes and practices will be an improvement for everyone.
Figure 3.2: Health promotion involves many support systems that contribute to improving health.

**INQUIRY: What is health promotion?**

In groups, recall and list any health promotion strategies or initiatives that have been introduced to address the following health concerns:

- tobacco smoking
- binge drinking
- depression
- road injuries
- skin cancer.

Share your group's responses with the class.