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Linking Primary Care and Public Health: the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care

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Background: Widespread support exists for the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care and its previous 25-years of work pioneering the development of preventive care guidelines. This provides an opportunity to build on this foundation and ensure that the renewed Task Force model is appropriate to the current context of a health care system burdened by chronic disease and where primary care and public health issues increasingly intersect.

Purpose: This oral presentation will enhance understanding of priorities, opportunities and challenges to strengthening connections between public health and primary care in the context of practice guidelines. The findings will inform partnership approaches and plans for how the Canadian Task Force and other related national guideline development groups can help bridge public health and primary care.

Methods: Descriptive review of key International and Canadian reports and published literature relating to primary care and public health intersection. Thematic analysis of key informant interviews with regional and national primary care and public health researchers and practitioners.

Results: Highlights from the analysis indicate several key themes: the importance of combining practice guidelines with continued focus on patient/community need; identifying opportunities for service coordination and referral; the need to situate practice guidelines in a comprehensive range of services to improve population health from personal care to health promotion; improving care by applying a population perspective to medical practice; and the importance of regional, provincial and national efforts to support joint sector policy, training and research.

Discussion: Based on the findings of this analysis, opportunities to further complementary efforts between primary care, public and community health will be presented. In addition, implications for the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care and other similar national-level guideline development groups will be proposed in order to contribute to seamless preventive care and public health practice.