

Improving Health: Become a Self-Manager

Newfoundland and Labrador has an aging population and in 5 years, 22% of the population will be over the age of 65. As individuals get older, maintaining health becomes more difficult and the risk for developing chronic conditions is higher. In fact, over half of Newfoundland and Labradorians aged 12 and over have at least one chronic condition and one third of those have three or more chronic conditions.

A simple definition of a chronic condition is: *a long-lasting condition that slowly progresses over time but that is controllable*. Some examples of chronic conditions include Diabetes, Arthritis, COPD, Chronic Pain, Cancer, Depression, Heart Disease, Parkinson's, Lung Disease and many more.

Chronic conditions can also be described as:

- Having many causes and risk factors such as smoking, lack of exercise, unhealthy diet, excess alcohol use, etc.
- Chronic conditions can occur at any age but are more common later in life.
- Chronic conditions can affect quality of life and ability to carry out daily functions.
- Chronic conditions require individuals to play a role in managing their condition, with support from communities and healthcare professionals, so that they can live long healthy lives.

Managing a chronic condition can be very difficult, especially with busy and many commitments and responsibilities. Many people lack the support and skills needed to deal with the many symptoms that come along with having a chronic condition such as pain, fatigue, stress and other difficult emotions. Having the skills to manage those symptoms and take care of your health is what is considered good self-management.

As a part of a provincial strategy, Western Health now offers a Self-Management program for anyone living with a chronic condition or for those who support or live with someone who has a chronic condition. This program is called *Improving Health: My Way* and is offered in communities across the Western region. Since the program began in 2011, there have been programs held in Port Saunders, Norris Point, Deer Lake, Corner Brook, St. George's, Codroy Valley and several other communities. The program is free of charge and consists of six sessions, with one being delivered per week. Some of the topics covered in the sessions include:

- Dealing with difficult emotions
- Pain and fatigue management
- Making healthy food choices
- Problem solving and action planning
- Position thinking and better breathing
- Working with your health care professional

The program is delivered by two trained leaders, one or both who have taken the program in the past and who also live with a chronic condition. The program is highly interactive and offers a variety of skills so people can choose the ones they want to use.

If you or someone you know is interested in participating in the *Improving Health: My Way* program or want to find out more information please call the Regional Self-Management Coordinator at 637-5000 ext 6689 or e-mail selfmanagement@westernhealth.nl.ca.

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