

Dealing with chronic health conditions

SMART Fund supports another innovative community-based initiative.

Our mind-body connection is more powerful than many of us might think. Most of us have experienced how emotional stress can affect our physical well-being, while on the other hand having a positive outlook and being connected to one's community can often energize our bodies and help us feel well.

The University of Victoria, Centre on Aging, offers a six-week self-management education program - *Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions* - that provides practical suggestions to help overcome everyday obstacles so people with chronic health conditions can get more out of life. The program, which is free for participants, is offered in Richmond, Vancouver, and the North Shore. Funding is provided by VCH's SMART Fund*.



“This program is offered within Vancouver Coastal Health and is a way to build skills within our communities so our residents can identify and manage their own health needs,” explains Lezlie Wagman, Coordinator, SMART Fund. “The Fund supports communities to find solutions to their health issues, as opposed to having solutions developed for them.”

“When I first realized how bad my heart was, I had no future outlook. I came home and sat and there is where I stayed. I wasn't eating properly. If someone said 'go for a walk', I'd say 'I'm too tired'. But then I started attending the program and getting information. I improved my outlook because I got myself in a stage where I'm content that I have to do these things. I will have to go for heart surgery, but I'm on an exercise program now. I'm living the best I can and I'm getting the very best out of each day.”

- program participant

The program builds confidence in coping with everyday challenges of living with a chronic condition and participants learn new information and tools that can assist them in maintaining a more active, fulfilling life by focusing on building skills, sharing experiences and support.

This program was initially developed at Stanford University, and has been in use for 15+ years. Recent local research confirms it is making a real difference in the lives of participants.

“The program is led by people with chronic health conditions, most are past participants who then take our leader training workshop,” explains Karen Hannah, Program Co-ordinator. “It makes a difference for participants that the leaders are dealing with similar issues.”

For more information on the program and how to register, visit their web site at:

www.coag.uvic.ca/research/healthyliving or call 604-940-3568.

Self-management education includes teaching participants how to:

- get started with exercises;
- manage nutrition;
- deal with fatigue;
- problem-solve;
- communicate effectively;
- deal with anger, fear and frustration;
- use cognitive symptom management techniques;
- deal with depression;
- evaluate treatment options; and
- effectively work with health care professionals.

** VCH's SMART Fund supports cost-effective, innovative strategies for promoting and improving population health. The projects typically improve health determinants and build community capacities, skills and assets so communities can better identify and manage their own health needs.*