



Illustration: Will Yee

# the many layers of wellness

We asked 10 Albertans what wellness means to them. As their answers reveal, no one definition applies, although common themes abound. By **Anne Georg**

**T**he right words to fully grasp the meaning of wellness are difficult to find. Wellness is multi-dimensional. It includes physical and mental well-being as well as social ties and emotional resiliency. But what does that mean?

We asked 10 Albertans—some in the health-care sector and a number in other sectors—to define what wellness means to them personally and how they encourage and contribute to it in their lives, organizations and communities. This is what they told us.



## Joanne Ganton

Manager, Patient & Family Centred Care,  
South Health Campus  
Alberta Health Services

When it opens later this year, the South Health Campus will be far more than Alberta's newest hospital. It is a work in progress to engage the community and to provide a place where people can connect and be well—not just a place to treat illness.

We believe a person struggling with an illness or health condition is still capable of achieving a strong sense of well-being.

Calgary's South Health Campus was designed to embody wellness as a mindset among patients, families, staff, physicians, students and the broader community.

We will strive to create opportunities at the campus for wellness and healing through physical activity, healthy eating, stress control and providing access to health information and resources.

As examples, our wellness kitchen will teach nutrition and cooking to help improve wellness and foster social connections. The courtyards and pathways will create an environment that inspires better staff, patient and family wellness.

## Billy Strean

Professor, Faculty of Physical  
Education and Recreation  
University of Alberta



Laughter helps keep us well. When you laugh with other people or smile, there's a social connection we share without language. We also take in more oxygen, release and reduce stress, and improve our immune function. When we laugh, we create a child-like atmosphere and we have joyful thoughts.

We need to be well spiritually. That means kindness, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, cultivating joy and connecting with something bigger than the self. That could be a charitable cause or anything that offers a broader horizon beyond yourself. Connecting with things that connect us all is associated with a greater sense of wellness.

## Dean Krawec

Board president  
Edmonton Sled Hockey Club

I am a double amputee and I've been like this for the past 18 years.

Wellness means being comfortable with who I am, accepting my limitations and being able to get out and do things, like playing and watching sports.

Physical wellness and emotional wellness go hand in hand. If I don't feel well, I don't want to go out and do activities. Once I'm out, I feel better being with people doing exercise. I laugh and smile.

Wellness includes having family and friends you can count on and having social interactions.

Wellness is finding your joy.

## Dr. Michael Trew

Senior medical director  
Addiction and Mental Health  
Alberta Health Services



In a poetic sense, wellness is about standing in front of the palette of life and having many colours that are distributed in pleasing ways.

It's hard to imagine wellness without a modicum of optimism. Being well

is about working with what you have, opposed to yearning for what you don't have.

Wellness is about being physically active to your ability and being socially active. On the emotional line, you have to be able to be positively invested in things interesting and enjoyable to you. Spiritual wellness encompasses some sense of meaning beyond what we see in the immediate present.

In that spectrum of the emotional and spiritual is a sense of hope for ourselves and the world around us.

## Fred Horne

Minister  
Alberta Health and Wellness

On a societal level, we can only move ahead and be productive economically if we have a population with a high degree of wellness.

That means society offers more than just opportunities for career advancement. It takes leisure time seriously and invests in cultural and leisure centres, and it makes the best use of them to reach out to citizens.

To be well, society needs income support to help people today as an investment for healthy populations down the road.

Our publicly funded health-care system needs to focus on wellness over the long term to improve the health of existing generations and to contribute to future generations. We also need to promote wellness and to build a society that has a common understanding of what it means to be well.

## Jim Gray

Independent director, Brookfield  
Asset Management Inc.



Wellness is about making an investment in our own health by dedicating ourselves to keeping a positive attitude and remaining physically and mentally active on a regular basis. We can't take anything for granted.

I also feel part of wellness is contributing to my community.

There's a social dimension to wellness, too. Wellness has a lot to do

with levels of employment, poverty issues, early childhood development and education.

There's a direct link between poverty and mental health. Also fundamental to wellness are nutrition and activity in schools.

In terms of our health-care system, we need to talk more about health and wellness.

## Dr. Gerry Predy

Senior medical health officer  
Alberta Health Services

Wellness includes intellectual, emotional and physical health.

On the emotional side, if someone can't sleep because he is worried, it will affect his wellness and his ability to function.

Intellectual wellness has nothing to do with your IQ. It is the ability to cognitively think things through to organize and steer yourself though the day.

The environment plays a role in wellness. Air pollution and noise pollution, or a sense of unease because you are living in an unsafe neighbourhood, all have a negative influence on wellness.

At AHS, our role in wellness includes



influencing various sectors to create appropriate social and environmental conditions so people can experience a sense of wellness. For example, we advocate for good road systems that help reduce collisions, we support people who want to quit smoking and we're working to offer healthier food choices in our facilities for patients, staff and visitors.

## Nicole Letourneau

Professor, Norlien/Alberta  
Children's Hospital Foundation  
Chair in Parent-Infant Mental  
Health, Faculty of Nursing,  
University of Calgary



Wellness revolves around children having the best possible start in life. Children become adults and their early experience makes or breaks their health and wellness as adults.

Wellness is a societal responsibility. If children receive parental support as they develop, as adults they will have the best chance of living with good mental and physical health and having healthy relationships that positively contribute to their sense of self, well-being and productivity as citizens. Not surprisingly, they are also more prepared to be supportive parents to their own children.

To have healthy individuals in society, we need to value and support the role of parents in raising the next generation. We need to understand and support parents' importance in the health of children—society's future workforce and source of economic prosperity. All we have is our children and if we don't support parents, we hurt our own society.

## Pritma Dhillon

Manager, Health and Wellness  
WestJet

At WestJet, wellness is defined broadly as achieving one's optimal state of personal well-being both at work and in the home environment.

WestJet was built on the premise that if we take care of our people, our people will take care of our guests, who will

in turn take care of our business. Our wellness program is part of offering our employees a world-class employment experience.

We believe that investing in the health of our most valued assets, our people, is simply the right thing to do.

To that end, we offer our employees a variety of facilities and services, including a gym, fitness studio, fitness classes, and massage and physical therapy. We also offer healthy meals through an on-site Sunterra market.

We have a well-used employee and family assistance program that offers individual counselling and monthly lunchtime learning sessions on a variety of physical and emotional wellness issues. Our robust disability management and return-to-work program is managed internally by a team of health professionals.

My personal definition of wellness is about achieving the right balance in my physical, emotional, social, spiritual and financial health.

## Bob Davisson

Founder  
Lifeline Haiti

Giving people hope is the main driving force behind wellness.

When people work as one community, it gives them hope for the future and allows them to press through the tough times. They have a purpose as an individual in a family and as part of a community. That's part of wellness.

Wellness is not just about feeding children in Haiti. It's about giving them an education so they see they have a future and giving their lives meaning beyond mere survival. It means providing gainful employment for people and not just giving them food or medicine. Then they have something to live for.

To ask people to give of themselves provides a sense that they are needed and also supports wellness. I feel better in my wellness when I can help. 