Promoting
the AQHI
A How-To Guide

Promoting the Air Quality Health Index A How-To Guide

Using proven promotional tools to spread the word about the Air Quality Health Index

Prepared for Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development by CSI Communication Solutions Inc.

NOTE: This guide was originally prepared for Environment Canada by Communication Solutions in 2008 to support AQHI outreach through stakeholder partners across the country.

About this Guide

This is a guide for promoting and educating audiences about the Air Quality Health Index. The information within focuses on community based outreach and promotional tools.

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Section One

Overview: What is the Air Quality Health Index?

The Air Quality Health Index or "AQHI" is a scale from 1 to 10 designed to help people understand what the outdoor air quality means to their health. The AQHI pays particular attention to people who are sensitive to air pollution – those with pre-existing health conditions, children, the elderly and people active outdoors – and provides them with health advice based on the quality of the air in a given community.

The Air Quality Health Index is updated several times a day at airquality.alberta.ca and communicates four primary things;

- A number from 1 to 10 indicating the air quality. The higher the number, the greater the health risk associated with the air quality. When the amount of air pollution is very high, the number will be reported in the + category.

- A category that describes the level of health risk associated with the AQHI reading (Low, Moderate, High or Very High Health Risk).

- Health messages customized to each category for both the general population and "at risk" population.

- Current hourly AQHI readings and maximum forecasted values for today, tonight and tomorrow.

Social marketing and the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)

Social marketing recognizes that the same principles used to sell products to consumers can be used to also promote ideas or shift attitudes and behaviours. The key difference between the two is that social marketing seeks to influence social behaviours to benefit the target audience and society – not the marketer. However, like commercial marketing, the primary focus is on the consumer – on learning what people want and need.

Although the Air Quality Health Index communication, outreach and education efforts target individual behaviours, the approach and the language used to shift social behavior is most effective when designed to empower the audience to make individual changes for personal benefit. This section of the guide describes some of the key elements common to all successful social marketing campaigns.

The AQHI value is calculated by using a formula which combines the readings of three specific pollutants – **fine particulate matter, ozone and nitrogen dioxide**. Because of Alberta's energy based economy, other pollutants monitored in the province are also considered when reporting the AQHI. These pollutants include **sulphur dioxide, hydrogen sulphide, total reduced sulphur and carbon monoxide**. Additionally, special community-based messaging for **odour and visibility** is an added feature of Alberta's AQHI.

Guidelines for planning the work

The sum is greater than the parts. Use a partnership model to bring strength and reach to your AQHI outreach campaign. Given the complexity of creating behaviour change, it is impossible for any one organization to achieve desired outcomes independently. Partnerships between government, business and non-profit sectors bring resources and credibility to the project.

Find out what matters to your target audience. Use your understanding of the audience to help define your message and delivery tactics. Think about what matters to them (not your organization) – and tie that understanding to your messaging regarding air quality and health.

Focus on "doable behaviours" that are well-defined. Think about what you want the audience to 'do' in response to the AQHI messages. Then ask -- "is this behaviour achievable?" A phased approach that promotes small steps to reach a larger change may be most appropriate in your community.

Help the audience understand the benefits. New behaviours have to be positioned in a way that demonstrates to people how they will benefit by paying attention and participating in a program.

Give people what they want most. Web and mobile-based marketing may be effective in reaching a younger audience but will be less effective in engaging seniors. Children may prefer lots of images in a print tool while commuters want the AQHI 'pushed' to them through the radio and on their mobile devices. Targeting the right audience with the right message through the right medium will increase engagement with the AQHI.

Use strategies that overcome barriers. Behavioural change is influenced by many factors. Identifying barriers to engagement and then reducing or eliminating those barriers will lead to more successful uptake of the AQHI. Potential barriers to AQHI engagement may include accessibility to the AQHI, air quality awareness, language, physical inactivity etc.

Attract "key influencers" and "early adopters" first. Key influencers are often celebrities who are high profile, admired leaders. Early adopters are individuals who use the product successfully and who are willing to act as public spokespersons. In these circumstances individuals must be seen as credible to the target audience. As an example a young sports personality with asthma may have strong relevance to youth, where a high profile weather reporter may bring credibility to the AQHI for an older audience.

Develop a phased approach. Build in flexibility to incorporate new learnings along the way - often small behaviours are the best approach to comprehensive behavioural change. As you prepare for the introduction of the AQHI in your region consider how to build incremental steps that encourage participation. A phased approach also offers flexibility in timing and strategy in response to audience engagement.

Guidelines for action

Present clear, authentic messages and engaging visuals. Clear messages and engaging visuals are essential for helping the audience retain information. Language is particularly influential in engaging people and must be vibrant, clear, jargon-free and highlight the benefits of engagement. Language must consider the challenges of different age groups, low-literacy and multi-ethnic communities. Similarly, engaging visuals reinforce language and help decrease confusion about a product (the AQHI) and how it should be used.

Ask for feedback and measure success. A phased approach at the planning stage provides the flexibility to take advantage of lessons learned through audience feedback. Measurement not only increases accountability, it can also facilitate deeper engagement by identifying barriers and successes. Surveys and web statistics are two examples of how to measure if behavioural change has occurred and to what degree.

Include celebrity power where possible. Key influencers, including celebrities and athletes, are powerful catalysts of behaviour change. They generate excitement and visibility for many causes. As launch ambassadors, these spokespersons provide credibility and raise the profile of the AQHI in the public and media.

Make it easy to participate. Provide accessible tools that support the desired behavioural change. Making tools easily available to partners and target audiences facilitates the adoption of new behaviours. These tools may include print resources, promotional tools and web-based resources.

Consider technology that supports action. Consider how a discussion group, blog, app, or online social networking group could complement your marketing program and create easy, actionable things for your target audience to do that supports behaviour change.

Assessment of outreach capacity among stakeholder audiences

An Alberta web-based survey was developed in 2012-2013 to target provincially-based healthcare professionals to gauge interest and awareness in the AQHI, as well as identify opportunities for sharing air quality and health information with patients and clients.

The anonymous survey was developed to take about three to five minutes, and was distributed through a variety of health networks including government, professional associations, non-government organizations, and via individual health care providers. The survey was available between February 15 and March 25, 2013.

Highlights include:

- Almost 73% said given their understanding of the AQHI, they would advise patients/clients to use it to manage their health.
- Most respondents favoured the AQHI app as an effective way to inform people of the AQHI, followed by a fridge magnet and fact sheet and AQHI phone number.

This information has helped guide recommendations on the focus and types of tools shared and promoted to increase awareness of the AQHI among at-risk audiences and the public. A list of tools and uses follows.

Section Two
Tools to support promotion of the AQHI

airquality.alberta.ca

What is it? Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) developed the **airquality.alberta.ca** website to promote the AQHI with stakeholder audiences and the public, share information on how people can learn more about the Index through events and links, and where they can access it from (app, 1-800 number, mobile website, etc.). The website also serves as a host for a variety of tools and resources developed for health and environment stakeholder groups and the media to share AQHI information with individuals who are most affected by poor air quality.

How to use it: As a hub for information related to the AQHI, this website can be cited by stakeholder partners as the place to go to learn more, download tools, apps, and stay up to date.

AQHI athlete health video

What is it? This informative, one-minute video focuses on the importance of getting active outside, while reminding people that they can check the AQHI any time to find out what kind of "air day" it is outside in their communities.

How to use it: The AQHI athlete health video is hosted on YouTube and can be posted on stakeholder partner websites. The YouTube link is availalbe on the airquality.alberta.ca site under "Resources" within the left hand navigation menu. The video may be hosted and shared through any partners who have a mandate to promote healthy, active living inititiaves, air quality and health, and environmental stewardship initiatives.

Alberta AQHI app

What is it? The Alberta AQHI app has been developed to report the AQHI in Alberta communities on multiple mobile platforms including iOS, Android and BlackBerry. The app provides the current AQHI for communities, and the forecast where available, as well as health messages for the general population and at risk audiences.

How to use it: ESRD has received tremendous response for creating an AQHI app in multiple mobile platforms as this is the communication tool of choice for many audiences including health care providers, families with young children, people with chronic illnesses and even seniors. The app may be accessed through mobile provider app stores and can be promoted to target audiences in conjunction with the website and other promotional tools. Instructions for finding and downloading the app are also available on airquality.alberta.ca

The Alberta AQHI App is available for iOS, Android and BlackBerry mobile devices and is accessible through the respective App store. The Alberta AQHI app may also be accessed through airquality.alberta.ca
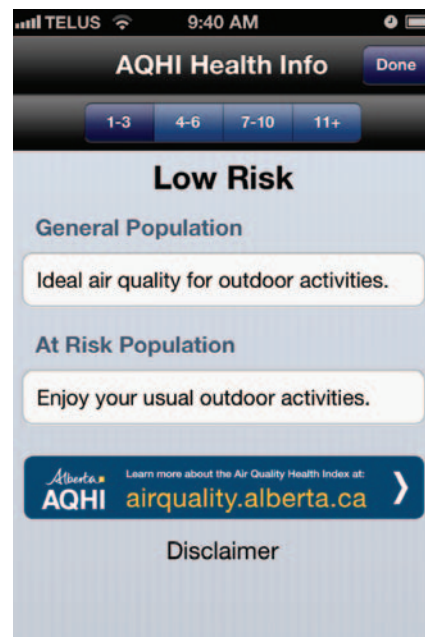
AQHI web button

What is it? A web button is essentially a graphic-advertisement on a webpage. The greatest advantages of web buttons are:

- They allow for visual branding (which is much more powerful than plain text).
- They are 100% measurable through website tracking.
- They allow you to make use of partner websites if the partner is willing to promote the AQHI on their site.

How to use it: Provide the web button as a JPEG to your web team and to your partners who have agreed to post the button. The instructions that accompany the web button must include the linking information – the URL address for the website that you want the button to link to.

For example: "Attached is the AQHI web button saved as a JPEG. Please instruct your webmaster to link the button to airquality.alberta.ca."

The AQHI web button is available for download at airquality.alberta.ca. Click the link "Resources" within the left hand navigation menu to access it.

AQHI branded print tools

What are they? A suite of branded print tools has been created to help spread the word about the Air Quality Health Index through partner organizations and among Alberta residents. This package includes AQHI rack cards, fridge magnets, brochures, and posters, all with information and calls to action to learn more about the Index and visit airquality.alberta.ca.

Additionally, AQHI tear pads have been created for health care organizations and health professionals to distribute with other respiratory and cardiovascular information or medications.

How to use them: This suite of branded print tools are available to stakeholder partners, who may distribute them during air quality and health events, and other opportunities that align with promotion of air quality and health to at-risk audiences and the general public. AQHI partner organizations can download these tools at airqualitiy.alberta.ca and use the left hand navigation option "Resources" to print at your convenience.

A limited number of tools may be ordered and mailed through ESRD by contacting Phyllis Chui, Air Policy, at phyllis.chui@gov.ab.ca or through The Lung Association, Alberta and NWT by contacting Beth Nanni, AQHI ambassador at bnanni@lung.ab.ca.

Below, from left to right, AQHI magnets, posters, rack cards/brochures and tear pads are available for distribution through stakeholder partners to at risk audiences and the public.
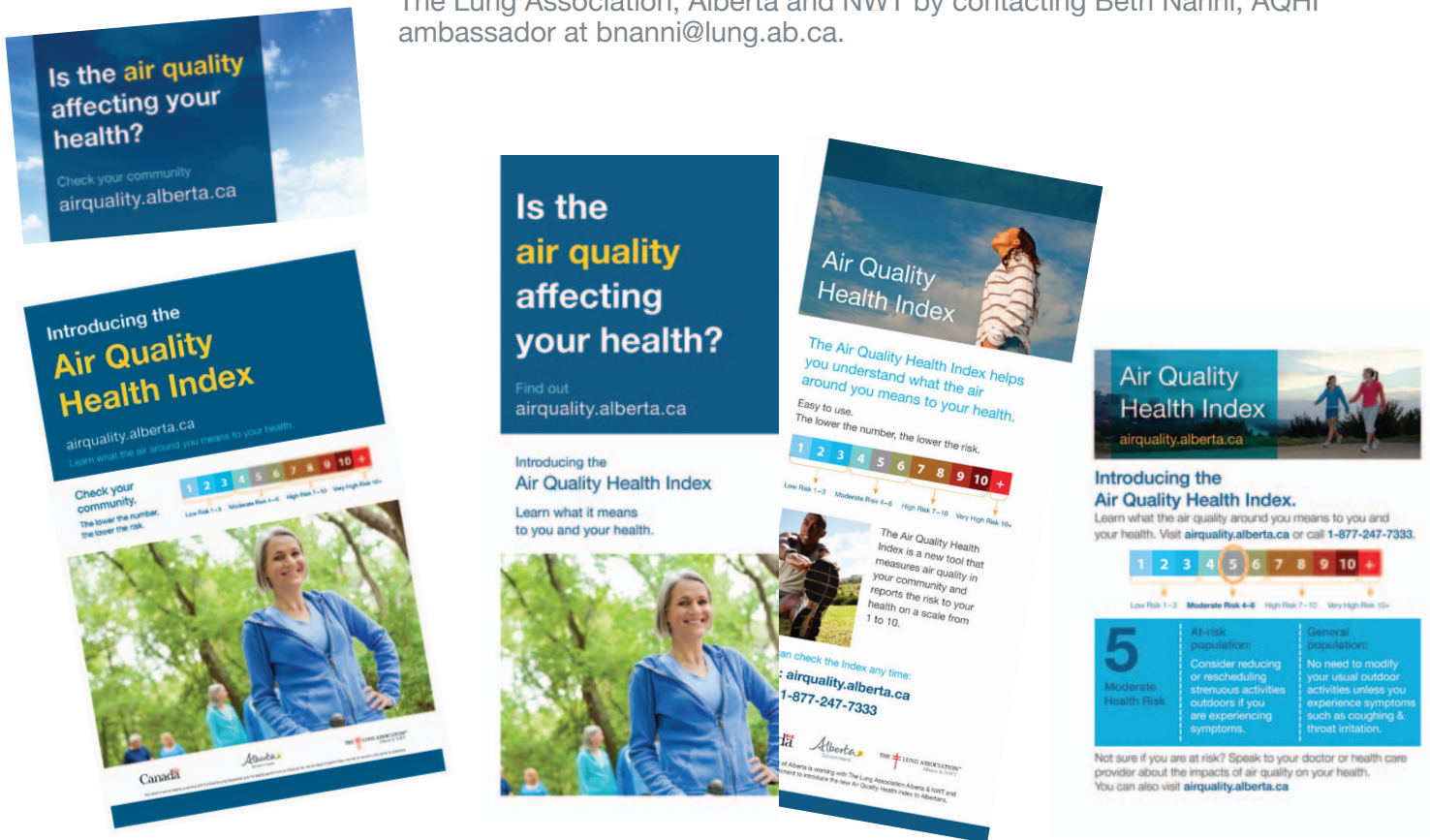
Matt copy/prepared articles

What is it? Matt copy is a prepared piece or article that contains all the information you want another partner to promote – within a newsletter or a newspaper story, on a website, during a broadcast, etc. Air Quality Health Index matt copy includes a description of what the AQHI is, where to find it, why it is relevant to people who are more at-risk to the impacts of air pollution, and calls to action to learn more and visit the website.

How to use it: Matt copy may be inserted into newsletters, emails, online discussion boards or blogs.

Sample: 200 words

Have you ever considered whether the quality of outdoor air may be affecting your health or wondered how active you should be on a given day? The new Air Quality Health Index or AQHI makes it possible for you to check the current air quality so you can plan your activities every day.

The AQHI (at airquality.alberta.ca) helps you understand what current air quality means for your health and helps you make decisions to limit your exposure to outdoor air pollution. The AQHI pays particular attention to people who are more sensitive to air pollution – those with pre-existing health conditions, children, seniors and people active outdoors – through special health messages about reducing exposure to risks.

Visit airquality.alberta.ca to learn more about air quality and associated health effects. Check on the current and forecast air quality for your community any time online, or download the "Alberta AQHI" app onto your mobile device.

For additional prepared AQHI articles in 400 and 500 word lengths, please contact Phyllis Chui, Air Policy, at phyllis.chui@gov.ab.ca.

FAQs and Backgrounder

What are they? Often packaged together for distribution to the media or in preparation for an announcement or public event, FAQs and backgrounders address the information needed to reinforce important key messages about the AQHI.

FAQ's provide simple answers to the most common questions related to the relationship between air quality and health, and about the AQHI in general.

Backgrounders are often packaged with other communication tools and provide opportunity to expand on ideas and information that should not be conveyed in great length in other pieces such as news releases, e-blasts and brochures. They are often used in conjunction with an announcement or media release to help fill in the details of the "big picture."

How to use them: FAQs and backgrounders can be used as part of a media package, stakeholder presentation package, or posted on partner websites where the AQHI is being promoted. They can also be used individually as an "added value" tool when promoting the AQHI to the public.

Key Messages

What are they? In the same way FAQs and backgrounders are used to inform external audiences like the public and the media, key message points may be used internally as valuable "nuggets of information" to be conveyed by spokespersons about the impacts of air pollution on health, to help explain how the AQHI works and how it fits into peoples' lives. Key messages help support consistent and understandable message sharing to the media and the public.

How to use them: Key messages may be distributed within organizations and/or among stakeholder groups who have agreed to share AQHI information and calls to action. They can play an important role in ramping up for a media event or presentation as they help to maintain consistency of messages, and are structured in an easy-to-remember format.

FAQs, Backgrounders and Key Messages are available for download on airquality.alberta.ca through the left hand navigation option "Resources for Media and Organizations."

AQHI Presentation Deck

What is it? A presentation deck is an approved presentation tool that can be used to provide information and visual supports for communicating the AQHI. A deck becomes an important tool when presenting information on the AQHI in relation to your organization and its role in supporting this program.

How to use it: A presentation deck may be used when developing partnerships for promoting the Air Quality Health Index or when providing audiences new information about the AQHI. It's especially valuable to new audiences because it gives a snapshot of the project using both a visual medium and face-to-face interaction to tell the story. Decks can be used at conferences and/or events on air quality, health and the environment, as well as for promotion to smaller groups who want to share information on the AQHI with colleagues, clients, etc.

An AQHI presentation may be downloaded from airquality.alberta.ca through the left hand navigation option, "Resources."
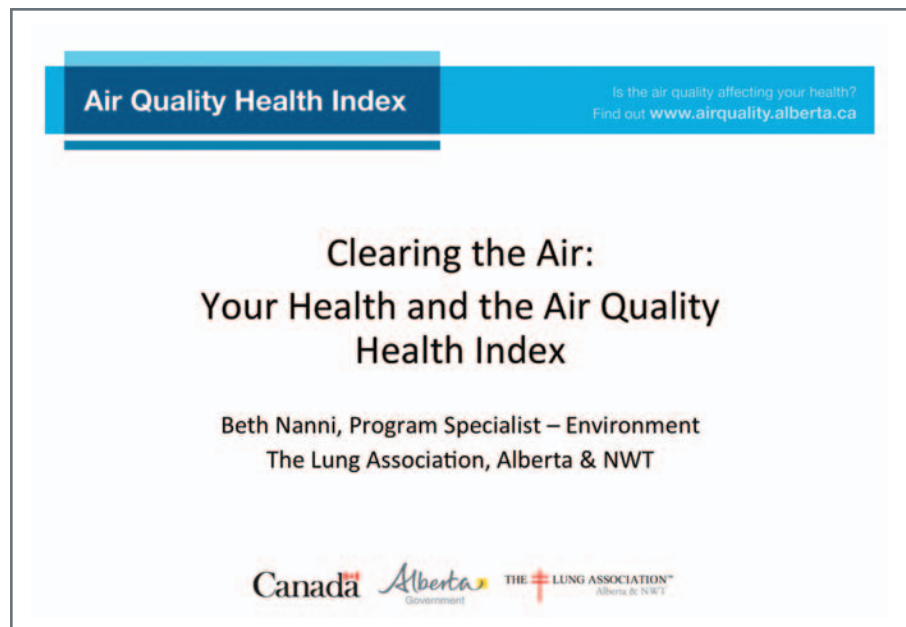
Opportunities to Promote the AQHI

Sample places, events and partners to promote the AQHI

Public Health Locations/Associations/Events:

- Flu clinics
- Doctors' offices/medical clinics
- Pharmacies
- Lung Association events or reports (ex. Stair Climb/State of the Air Report)
- Diabetes groups
- Heart and Stroke foundation
- Asthma support groups
- Health authorities
- Blood donor clinics
- Respiratory therapy associations
- Pre-natal classes and groups
- Waiting rooms in health care centres
- Seniors centres

Healthy Living Events/Groups/Associations:

- Clean Air Day
- Earth Day
- Running and triathalon events
- Science centres
- Fitness centres
- Weight Watchers
- Walking groups
- World COPD Day
- Local sports events or sport team facilities
- Airshed groups
- Media partners
- Environmental professionals/groups:
- Municipal environment or air quality departments
- School boards
- Daycares
- Elementary and secondary schools – outdoor events
- University or college programs (nursing, respiratory therapy, etc)
- First Nations – presentation to Chief and Council

Using Social Media Channels to Promote the AQHI

All the previously mentioned tools and channels to promote the AQHI can additionally be reinforced and supported through various organizations' social media networks and tools such as Facebook, Twitter, inclusion in a blog post or sharing of a video via YouTube.

Below are examples of how stakeholder partners have participated in sharing of AQHI messages.

The Lung Association, Alberta & NWT
11 January

Find out more about air quality & how it affects you. We'll be in Red Deer for the @expohealth tomorrow talking about the #AQHI

Like · Comment · @lungabnwt on Twitter · Share

Healthy Living Expo @ExpoHealth   9 Jan
Visit the Air Quality Health Index booth @ExpoHealth to learn more about
air quality it affects you.
Expand