

dollars invested, it has done only half as well as Germany. Other countries that performed more efficiently than Canada also include Switzerland, Italy, Austria, New Zealand, Denmark and France.

The efficiency differences could stem from a number of sources, and learning more about the characteristics that define the strongest performers is necessary to improve our own system. How much does it have to do with healthcare providers, their training and the incentives placed on them? How much does it have to do with patients, their access to and the price they pay for care? And how much does it have to do with the structure of the delivery system? Studying the best performers may offer us important lessons in medical care delivery.

Beyond medical care, we need to address further how

social conditions shape health. The countries outperforming us make effective social investments to promote health and well-being among children and adults alike. Just to name two: they provide job protected paid leave from work to meet health needs, and overwhelmingly, they ensure children receive early childhood education.

While Canada is far ahead of the U.S. in measures to promote population health, this work remains uneven and lags behind many competitors. Some provinces, like Quebec, have invested heavily in

universal access to early childhood care while others provinces have done very little on this front. The same can be said for basic working conditions like job protected sick leave, which remains spotty across the

country. Affordable housing has become scarce in most of Canada's urban centres. Poverty rates in Canada, while lower than the US, have been on the rise — and poverty is one of the leading determinants of poor health.

If Canadians are going to continue to increase life

expectancy, we'll need to invest in preventing disease and promoting health, while ensuring that we learn the most efficient ways to spend healthcare dollars for those who do become sick.

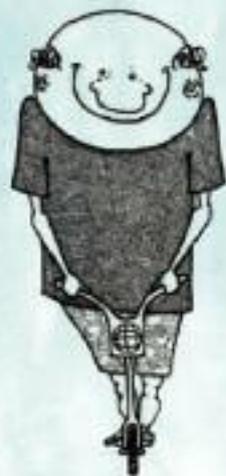
Jody Heymann is an expert advisor with EvidenceNetwork.ca and Dean of the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health. Prior to this, Heymann held a Canada Research Chair in Global Health and Social Policy at McGill University. Douglas Barthold is a doctoral candidate in economics, and a doctoral fellow at McGill University's Institute for Health and Social Policy.



...we need to address further how social conditions shape health...

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU COULD BREATHE BETTER?

I would let my hair fly in the wind.



Stop and smell the Roses. Literally.



Learn to play a mean horn.



Tell us what you would do.

Email: carol@ab.lung.ca or go to www.poweredbybreathing.com