“The Focus is on Health, Not Weight” 2019 Paper Backgrounder

What is the purpose of this resource?
The VCH paper The Focus is on Health, Not Weight shares current research findings and presents overarching principles for addressing weight-related issues to promote optimal health and well-being for all. The purpose of this resource is to help VCH practitioners (including public health, mental health, clinical settings, and primary care) incorporate current evidence into their practice.

Why focus on health, not weight?
Body weight is often viewed as easy to control, through “eating less and moving more”. However, weight is not a behaviour and is affected by many factors such as genetics, environment, and social/economic situations. Weight bias creates health inequities. Every client is entitled to respect, inclusion, and compassionate services.

Who wrote the paper?
This paper is an updated version of a 2014 paper, “The Focus is on Health, Not Weight”. The current version was revised by representatives from VCH Public Health Dietitians, Eating Disorders Program, Mental Health, Regional Prevention and Public Health, a Medical Health Officer, and endorsed by the Public Health Program Coordinating Committee on November 28, 2019.

How can this paper be used?
Although this document originated within VCH Public Health, the principles can be incorporated into day-to-day work across all programs and populations. Collaboration within VCH departments and with external partners can help improve health outcomes. Please share this paper with co-workers, other disciplines and programs. Consider not only direct client care but also the impact on any written content and use of images for the public in newsletters, articles, reports or presentations. This paper reinforces content from the online training module Balanced View: Addressing Weight Bias and Stigma in Health Care. Much like the online cultural competency training, it raises awareness about weight stigma and our own personal beliefs.

How can the paper be shared?
When sharing the paper with others, it is recommended to share the direct external link so that anyone can view the paper which you can find here. Other web locations of the paper include:
Internet: Research & Reports
Intranet: Public Health Practice Resources page
Child and Youth Nutrition page
Youth Clinic Resources

Additional Resources (also refer to resources in The Focus is on Health, Not Weight paper)
Online training: Addressing Weight Bias and Stigma in Health Care
Self-Compassion Workshops offered across VCH through Employee Wellness

If you require resources that this background document or paper doesn’t cover, please contact one of the programs that participated in the working group.