

GASHA holds first community health board week

by Brendan Dunbar

GASHA celebrated its first-ever Community Health Board

Week from May 2-6.

The celebration aimed to focus attention on the boards and

the role they play in determining the health of community members.



Brenda MacKinnon (left), chairperson of the Antigonish community health board, joins Almon Chisholm, chairperson of the Strait community health board; Peggy Mahon, primary health care facilitator for the Antigonish and Guysborough community health boards; Treka Burke; and MLA Angus MacIsaac to sign a proclamation declaring May 6 to be Community Health Board Week. The signing took place on Monday afternoon at MacIsaac's office. (Brendan Dunbar photo)

ity Act for the province. Under GASHA there are three community health boards," Brenda MacKinnon, chairperson of the Antigonish board, said.

Each board consists of 13 to 16 members, all volunteers, and all from the communities the board represents.

"Their primary role is to assess community health needs and to make a community plan," Mahon said.

The board gathers information about the health and well-being of the people living in a community, and creates an action plan that addresses the needs they find.

This information is then passed along to the district health authority — in this case, GASHA.

"The community health board can play a fairly key role in the kinds of services provided to a community," Mahon said.

MacKinnon said that Health Connections arose from the board's recommendations.

Health Connections, in the Royal George building, serves as a meeting space for the community to learn about disease management and preventative medicine.

"We've been open since February, and we've had more than 250 people come through, doing programs," MacKinnon said.

The board addresses community health from a broad perspective.

"Community health boards are really concerned about health issues in mind, body and spirit," she said.

MacKinnon thinks it's time to have the public recognize the contributions the boards make.

"Community health boards are fairly new to the province, and I think we're getting to the point where we want to recognize Community Health Board Week."

By making more people aware of the role community health boards play, MacKinnon hopes to draw more volunteers.

"We're always looking for community health board members," she said.

Members must attend one board meeting a month, plus task group and committee meetings.

"It's a fairly onerous commitment," MacKinnon, a six-year

volunteer on the Antigonish board, said.

She hopes to draw people from all segments of the broader Antigonish community.

"They've done a really good job to make sure the board represents the diversity of the community," Mahon said.

Board members represent, African-Canadians, Mi'kmaq, town and county, men and women, she noted.

Three youths also have positions on the board.

"It's been really great. They bring a different perspective," she said.

"We've always used what we call a social justice lens. We've always tried to make sure that equality and equity are a part of everything we do," MacKinnon said.