

# Focus Testing Healthy Home Environmental Health Guide Executive Summary

Prepared for Health Canada

Prepared by Narrative Research  
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## Executive Summary

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## Background and Research Methodology

In support of the Chemical Management Plan, Health Canada works to increase the public's awareness of the risks associated with chemicals and pollutants, as well as proposing actions that could be taken by Canadians to reduce their exposure. Launched in 2019, the Healthy Home campaign provides information to Canadians that motivates them to take action to protect themselves and their families from chemicals and pollutants in and around the home. To broaden the target audience, new materials are currently being developed to better reach vulnerable populations, such as pregnant women, seniors, Indigenous Peoples, newcomers, and individuals with pre-existing medical conditions, among others. Research was needed at this time to assess the content of a new Healthy Home Environmental Health Guide and tip sheets that are in the process of being developed to reach these vulnerable audiences.

Testing focused on messaging and ideas around the content, organization and formatting of these products that will be available online and in print format once finalized. More specifically, the research goal was to evaluate the new guide and tip sheets to determine if the content is:

- clearly understood by the audience(s);
- credible, relevant and of value to the audience(s);
- appealing and appropriate to the audience(s);
- memorable in the minds of the audience(s); and
- able to motivate the audience(s) to take intended action(s).

To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was undertaken. This entailed a total of 22 online focus groups conducted on February 16-19, 2021 across five locations (Halifax, Toronto, Montreal, Regina and Vancouver) as well as two regional groups conducted with Indigenous peoples, as outlined below. In each of five urban locations, one focus group was conducted with each of the following four audiences: parents of children 0-6 years old; seniors 65 years or older; newcomers that have lived in Canada less than five years; and pregnant women or those who intend to become pregnant in the next year. In addition, two groups were conducted with Indigenous peoples, one with residents of Ontario and one with residents from Prairies and Western provinces. Each group included a mix of gender (with the exception of pregnant women/expecting to be), age (within range), household type, education level and cultural background (where relevant).

Group discussions were held in English with the exception of those in Montreal which were conducted in French. Participants were provided an incentive of \$100. Across all groups, a total of 219 individuals were



recruited and 187 participated. Two additional participants were incentivized given technology issues during the sessions.

All participants were recruited per the recruitment specifications for the Government of Canada. Recruitment was conducted through qualitative panels stored on Canadian servers, with follow up calls to confirm the details provided and to ensure quotas were met. This report presents the findings from the study. Caution must be exercised when interpreting the results from this study, as qualitative research is intended to be directional only. Results cannot be attributed to the overall population under study, with any degree of confidence.

### Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as a Representative of Narrative Research that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Directive on the Management of Communications. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed

Margaret Brigley, CEO & Partner | Narrative Research

Date: March 8, 2021

### Key Findings and Conclusions

The following summarizes the key findings and conclusions from the *Focus Testing Healthy Home Environmental Health Guide* research study.

#### Overall Reactions

The Healthy Home Environmental Health Guide and the four tip sheets were well received and deemed as providing useful information for all living in Canada, but notably for homebuyers and newcomers. Although most information and advice appeared as common sense, the material was also felt to include a sufficient amount of new or surprising facts to be considered useful. The material was engaging and the information was found to be pertinent and actionable.

As the topic of environmental health appears to be top-of-mind for many people, there was a desire to clearly understand the rationale behind some of the advice provided, especially if the tips or suggestions addressed common behaviours or perceptions. For example, the material should explain why bleach should not be used to clean mould, or why single-use food plastic containers should not be reused, both of which appear to be common current practices. At the same time, alternatives to products commonly used but which Health Canada has found to be harmful to health (e.g., boric acid to make slime) should be mentioned where available, and instructions on how to use these alternatives should be provided (e.g., including a recipe for slime that does not include boric acid). Although there is trust in the



information provided, explaining what consequences there might be for inaction (either not testing or not addressing an issue) should be considered to make the advice even more compelling.

While the depth of information was liked, there is uncertainty regarding the level of urgency required to act upon the various pieces of advice provided. So as not to cause alarm, but at the same time motivate action, it was suggested to indicate the relative importance of testing for the various chemicals and pollutants in the home, based on their level of danger or potential harm.

Despite the guide and tip sheets providing information of interest, the documents' effectiveness may be affected by the perception that they contain a lot of common-sense information that is already known. As such, the material should more strongly explain its relevance for people who believe they are already aware of safe practices. One way to do that would be to include statistics illustrating the prevalence of an unsafe behaviour or showing the negative impact of improper use of chemical products. Demonstrating how current practices can be harmful would also help establish the guide's relevance.

The following sections provide an overview of reactions to the guide and the tip sheets. During the focus groups, a more in-depth review uncovered specific areas that need to be addressed in each document. Those comments are included in the detailed analysis section of the report.

### **Healthy Home Environmental Health Guide**

The guide was considered an appropriate length for a more in-depth resource. The diversity and choice of topics was appreciated, though some areas were felt to be missing. These included fire safety, chemicals and children or pets, attic maintenance, ventilation/heating ducts, air purifying, gardening and outdoor living, battery storage and disposal, BBQ safety, water testing for other reasons than lead, and pesticides allowed in Canada. In addition, addressing storage of chemicals for those who do not have access to a garage or a shed was often suggested. Those renting their home expressed an interest for more information on landlords' responsibilities when it comes to testing for chemicals and addressing any problems, as well as what recourse tenants have if landlords are not complying.

Although the information generally appeared well organized in the guide, some of the topics appeared as unrelated to one another, or irrelevant to a guide focused on addressing chemicals in and around the home. A more logical structure would entail grouping daily activities in a section (both indoors and outdoors) and grouping activities that related to renovations or special projects together. Organizing the information by end-user was also a key suggestion, though far less commonly. Overall, the use of the cosmetics section was seen as more appropriate in the everyday section, while the sections on air quality and staying safe on hot days were not readily associated with chemicals around the home.

While the level of language used throughout the guide was generally found to be simple and easy to understand, differences in tone (e.g., conversational vs. matter of fact) and the inconsistent use of key terms (e.g., how protective equipment is referred to or described) throughout the guide were noted.

A few other elements were noted as being of importance. The inclusion of emergency contact information was found to be useful and should be repeated in key areas of the guide. In addition, there is



a strong interest for key terms – both chemicals and various concepts – to be included in the glossary, with hyperlinks to facilitate with reviewing the material. At the same time, the infographic section would be considered a useful summary that could be used as a reference tool.

### **Tip Sheets**

The four tip sheets – tips for renters; tips for pregnancy and preparing for baby; tips to help keep your kitchen safe and healthy; and tips for do-it-yourself (DIY) projects and renovation, were well received and perceived as complementing the guide nicely. The brevity of information and actionable tone of the tip sheets were liked and provided a great reference tool for addressing specific situations or audiences' needs, as well as complementing the guide. To be even more engaging, the tip sheets should be designed as checklists that can be posted in key areas in and around the home to assist residents with assessing the safety of their home.

### **Format and Accessibility**

In terms of making the information accessible, newcomers were interested in further guidance on where to find information on municipal and provincial regulations, what type of professional assistance is available, and who to call in emergencies.

Indigenous peoples, for their part, noted the importance of acknowledging cultural practices in the guide (e.g., smudging), and providing advice on how they can be carried out safely. More attention on water safety was also mentioned, given limited on-reserve access to clean water. The use of short text using simple language and graphics was also considered essential to ensure the material remains accessible.

Across groups, both an online and a paper format were considered useful. While online access was considered easier and more environmentally friendly to some, there was still an expressed need for printed material to jot down notes, post as reminders in key areas of the home, and to provide access to those who have limited internet access or proficiency.

The tip sheets and the guide's infographic should be provided as stand-alone documents that can be printed and posted in key areas of the home. Additional checklists by task (e.g., fall cleaning) should be considered.

In terms of the visual layout for the guide and tip sheet, the example provided appeared appropriate in the use of soft colours, bolded and underlined headers, and use of white space. While visuals are considered important to engage the reader, participants believe that images should be aligned with the topics in each section, provide clarification where needed, and illustrate the varying audiences targeted. In addition, the images should reflect the seriousness of the topic presented, without causing alarm or being too dreary.