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March 17, 2006

Minister Jim Watson
Ministry of Health Promotion
35th Floor, 250 Yonge Street
Toronto ON M5B 2N5

Dear Minister Watson,

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) represents the interests of more than 3,000 community and public health practitioners across Ontario. The mission of OPHA is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health and to strengthen the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario.

Violence is clearly an issue that leads to wide-ranging negative health outcomes for Ontario residents thereby posing a threat to families and communities. Despite this recognition Ontario continue to struggle to find effective long lasting solutions. The complexity of violence can be overwhelming, and effective interventions can only be achieved through collaborative interdisciplinary actions in which public health is a partner. Most importantly, change can only occur if action is taken at all levels of government and society.

OPHA recognizes violence as a public health issue and subsequently has adopted two positions papers written by the Violence Prevention Workgroup that provide direction regarding the implementation of violence prevention initiatives. The Violence Prevention Workgroup of the OPHA focuses on promotion, support and advocacy for the development of broad based violence prevention strategies. One of the objectives of the workgroup is to identify and disseminate best practices from existing violence prevention strategies to public health practitioners across Ontario.

Public health in Ontario has a significant role to play in violence prevention. A public health approach is evidence based, emphasizes population health and health promotion and utilizes epidemiology to document results. Despite a call for public health action to prevent violence and development of draft Mandatory Health Program and Services Guidelines (MHPSG) that include violence; a violence prevention mandate for public health practitioners is lacking. Development of a clear public health mandate would ensure effective, co-ordinated and comprehensive provincial and local approaches to

violence prevention.

With changes to the MHPSG pending, the OPHA Violence Prevention Workgroup requests that violence prevention be included within the scope of this review so that clear direction for public health action can be formulated. Members of the Workgroup would be pleased to provide consultation to the Ministry in this regard. If you have questions, please contact the Violence Prevention Workgroup Co-Chairs, Angela Loconte at (416) PH: (416) 338-7863 and Lori SnyderMacGregor at (519) 883-2005 x 5308.

We look forward to your written response.

Sincerely,

Dr. Garry Aslanyan
President, Ontario Public Health Association

cc.Dr. Sheela Basrur, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health
Joy Lang, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Public Health Division