

MEDIA RELEASE

OPHA and alPHa Urge Prompt Implementation of Child Poverty Initiatives
Ontario's Two Lead Public Health Associations Call for Action to Make the Plan Sustainable

(TORONTO, December 5, 2008) The Ontario Government's child poverty initiative is a welcome response to the campaign to reduce poverty in the province by 25 per cent over 5 years, but swift, decisive action on critical elements of the plan are key to reaping tangible long term benefits, Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) President Carol Timmings announced today.

Responding to the release of the government's highly anticipated Child Poverty Initiative by the Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Children and Youth Services and Chair of the government's Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction, Timmings praised the intent of the initiative and expressed hope that economic conditions, federal government participation and other externalities would not sidetrack an initiative that has commanded the overwhelming support of Ontarians.

"We have achieved social consensus on poverty reduction as a high priority in preserving the health of the people of Ontario," Timmings said regarding the efforts of OPHA, and many other groups who advocated together in support of the 25 in 5 campaign. "The policies, programs and initiatives the government has announced should be prioritized on the political agenda to reflect the importance of these economic and moral imperatives."

Timmings said the move to establish a Social Policy Institute that will focus on evidence-based social policy development and the evaluation of social policy interventions is of particular significance and would be particularly effective operating at arms length from government.

"We very much look forward to the Institute's contribution to the formulation of policy addressing the social determinants of child health, dental health, food security and policy that will contribute to a reduction in health inequities for which OPHA has consistently advocated," Timmings added.

"Such issues as Early Childhood Education, a viable minimum wage and other social policy interventions need to be examined," Timmings said. "Establishing targets, effective measurement and evaluation are important steps in charting our progress towards a healthier society today that is preparing its children for the challenges of tomorrow."

Dr. Charles Gardner, president of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) welcomed the initiative and called on the government to make a firm commitment to fighting poverty despite economic challenges.

"The fight against poverty is a very important social goal to be met in conjunction with more immediate short-term political or economic priorities," Dr. Gardner said. "Our quest should be to build an equitable society, with healthy communities in which everyone can prosper; investing in the health and well-being of the poorest of our citizens is essential in this quest."

OPHA also identified the government's investment in supporting physical activity-based after school programs and healthy eating as a particularly praiseworthy initiative. "Childhood obesity has been a longstanding public health concern and the government has acted decisively to address it," Timmings said of the after-school program that was initiated and developed through the Ministry of Health Promotion. "This investment in children's health protects our children today and will, over time, certainly increase long term health benefits to the population."

Founded in 1949, OPHA provides leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthens the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario. OPHA is an independent voice for public health with a strong commitment to advocacy, seeking to promote health equity, social justice inclusivity and diversity. OPHA provides access to local and provincial multidisciplinary community health networks.

Established in 1986, aPHa is a non-profit organization that provides leadership to Ontario's 36 boards of health and public health units. The Association works with governments and other health organizations, to advocate for a strong and effective public health system in the province, as well as public health policies, programs and services that benefit all Ontarians. .

--30--

For further information contact:

Ms. Connie Uetrecht
Executive Director
Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA)
(416) 367-3313 Ext 226

Ms. Linda Stewart
Executive Director
Association of Local Public Health Agencies (aPHa)
(416) 595-0006 Ext 22.