

May 6, 2005

Hon. George Smitherman  
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care  
Hepburn Block, 10th Floor  
80 Grosvenor St.  
Toronto ON 80 Grosvenor St.

Dear Minister Smitherman,

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) would like to commend the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and the Ontario government for its commitment to Healthier Ontarians and for the ongoing investments in health. The leadership that Dr. Basrur and her team has shown in the development and release of the Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives 2004 report demonstrates the Government's commitment to preventing obesity and promoting healthy lives.

As a next step, the OPHA would like to see a timeline for implementation for the Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives framework. We believe that there is great capacity and expertise within the Ministry and the public health system to move this initiative on to the next phase. The OPHA has been a supporter of the Ministry and look forward to providing assistance with the implementation of this initiative.

In addition, the OPHA would strongly encourage this government to make substantial investments in health promotion and prevention. Funding in this area has historically been a fraction of dollars spent on treatment and care. The direct economic burden of obesity in Canada has been estimated to be between 2.2 % to 3.9% of total health care costs.<sup>1,2,3</sup> The indirect costs of obesity, those associated with loss of wages, productivity, longer recover periods for related health issues, add to the overall costs of care.

Adverse health risks translates into a heavier burden on the health care system and budgets. We therefore support the Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating's recent Call to Action which recommends that an initial investment of \$19 million be allocated to a comprehensive strategy addressing healthy weights and obesity prevention across the public health system.

The OPHA through its members and constituent societies represents over 3000 individuals working in public and community health throughout Ontario. The key elements of that work include health promotion, disease prevention, health protection and

population health strategies aimed at improving the determinants of health for individuals and communities.

We applaud the efforts that the Ministry is making with respect to the development of healthy public policies, specifically those aimed at preventing disease and promoting health.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Garry Aslanyan  
President, Ontario Public Health Association

cc. Premier Dalton McGuinty, Government of Ontario  
Dr. Sheela Basrur, Chief Medical Officer of Health and Assistant Deputy Minister, MOHLTC  
Minister Greg Sorbara, Ministry of Finance  
John Garcia, Director, Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Branch, MOHLTC  
Helen Brown, Senior Nutrition Consultant, Public Health Division, MOHLTC  
Erica Di Ruggiero, Chair, Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating

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1. Colman, R. The Cost of Obesity in Nova Scotia. Cancer Care Ontario. March 2000
  2. Katzmaryk, Peter T., Janssen, I. The economic costs associated with physical inactivity and obesity in Canada: An Update. Can J Appl Physiol. 2004 Apr; 29(2):90-115
  3. Birmingham C, Muller L, Palepu A et al: The cost of obesity in Canada. CMAJ 1999; 160: 483-488.