

April 12th, 2010

Hon. Laurel Broten
Minister of Children and Youth Services
56 Wellesley Street West, 14th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S3

Dear Minister Broten:

We are writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) and the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa). Together we support a joint Social Determinants of Health Working Group that is made up of representatives from both associations. OPHA is a not-for-profit organization that provides a strong, unified independent voice for all citizens, public health professionals and volunteers, committed to improving the health of all Ontarians. alPHa is a non-profit association that represents the boards of health, medical officers of health, and senior managers working in the 36 health units across Ontario. More information about our two associations is enclosed.

Together, alPHa and OPHA have created a Social Determinants of Health Working Group. We would like to introduce ourselves and the Working Group to you as Minister of Children and Youth Services, as well as the lead for Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy. As organizations focused on the social determinants of health, especially their integration into public health program and service planning, our associations and our joint working group have taken a great interest in the development of the Strategy as well as the first report. We applaud your commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty for children and their families and would like to offer some initial comments on the first annual report.

Clearly, the development of valid indicators to measure poverty is an important first step in ensuring that government strategies are effective. We congratulate the government's progress in measurement tools, in particular the development of the Deprivation Index, and offer the expertise of the public health sector, now supported by the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, in completing any indicator work that remains to be done. Ontario's public health sector is mandated by the Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act to use population health, determinants of health and health inequities information to assess population health needs. The Ontario Public Health Standards mandate our sector to address social determinants of health as the underlying cause of health inequities. More specifically, we are mandated to identify priority populations and adapt our service delivery to reduce health inequities, assess and share information on health inequities, engage in multi-sectoral collaboration, and raise awareness with decision makers in finding systemic solutions to address health inequities. It is also important to note that health units have a critical role to play in ensuring that an increased proportion of full-term newborns are born within a healthy birth weight range as identified in the

Ontario Public Health Standards. We consider ourselves a resource to many partners, including municipal and provincial levels of government, and hope that you will turn to us for assistance in the measurement aspect of your poverty reduction efforts. Now that 2008 has been established as a baseline, we would be interested in discussing the ongoing surveillance of poverty and its impact in Ontario.

The first year of your Poverty Reduction Strategy has had several successes. The acceleration of the phase-in of the Ontario Child Benefit has benefitted many low-income families. We look forward to the outcome of your review of social assistance programs and also to the development of the long-term affordable housing strategy. Your annual report describes the low-income dental care program which we hope will be expanded to include adults, as well as children and youth. The prevention of dental caries and the promotion of oral health is yet one more example where both a population health perspective, i.e., fluoridation of drinking water, as well as a social determinants approach, i.e., ensuring that Ontario's families have access to good paying jobs that also provide dental benefits, can help achieve the desired outcomes.

Boards of Health, and public health unit staff, often play critical roles in facilitating or supporting community partnerships such as local poverty reduction networks that help address local needs. We look forward to hearing more about the Community Opportunities Fund and the action plan to support community hubs across Ontario. Be assured that public health will be there, and that we will work closely with our municipal and community partners to affect lasting change for a brighter future.

We would like to suggest that we meet to discuss the first report, to share more information with you about our working group and to talk about the role of public health units in moving the poverty reduction strategy forward. We will telephone your office within the next two weeks to arrange an appointment at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Liz Haugh
President
Ontario Public Health Association



Valerie Sterling
President
Association of Local Public Health
Agencies

cc: Hon. Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Dr. Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Connie Uetrecht, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association
Linda Stewart, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Sandra Laclé, Chair, Social Determinants of Health Workgroup
Rosana Pellizzari, Council of Medical Officers of Health and Member, Social Determinants of Health Workgroup
Brenda Guarda, Chair, Core Indicators Working Group (Simcoe Muskoka)
Anne-Marie Holt, President APHEO

enclosures

Who is alPHa?

The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) is the non-profit organization that provides leadership to boards of health and public health units in Ontario. Our members are the 36 health units across Ontario. alPHa works closely with the senior leadership in our member health units. This includes board of health members, medical and associate medical officers of health, and senior public health managers in each of the public health disciplines – nursing, inspections, nutrition, dentistry, health promotion, epidemiology and business administration.

alPHa represents the interests of the 36 public health units in Ontario and lends expertise to members on the governance, administration and management of health units. The Association also collaborates with governments and other health organizations, advocating for healthy public policy and a strong, effective and efficient public health system in the province.

Governance

The alPHa Board consists of 21 voting members:

- 7 representatives of the **Board of Health Section**, representing board of health members,
- 7 representatives of the **Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health, COMOH**, representing medical officers of health, and
- 1 from each of the seven **Affiliate Organizations** of alPHa:
 1. ANDSOOHA - Public Health Nursing Management
 2. AOPHBA - Association of Ontario Public Health Business Administrators
 3. APHEO - Association of Public Health Epidemiologists in Ontario
 4. ASPHIO - Association of Supervisors of Public Health Inspectors of Ontario
 5. HPO - Health Promotion Ontario
 6. OAPHD - Ontario Association of Public Health Dentistry
 7. OSNPPH - Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health

Mission Statement

alPHa, through a strong and unified voice, advocates for public health policies, programs and services on behalf of member health units in Ontario.

Long-Term Objectives

1. To assist local public health units in providing efficient and effective services that meets the needs of the people of Ontario.
2. To assist in establishing, through collaboration with other organizations, a unified and powerful voice for public health in Ontario which is consulted and respected.

What is Public Health?

If you have ever had a vaccination, eaten in a restaurant, gone swimming in a public pool, had a home visit from a nurse for advice on breastfeeding or seen a TV ad about the dangers of smoking, you have been served by the public health system.

Public Health is the part of the publicly-funded health system in Ontario that supports overall healthy populations by monitoring community health status, promoting healthy behaviours, identifying, minimizing and eliminating health hazards, investigating and managing disease outbreaks, enforcing health protection laws, and responding to health-related emergencies. It is the ounce of prevention that is worth a pound of cure.

Public Health Functions

The following is a small selection of public health programs and services that are aimed at preventing health problems and prolonging healthy lives; and ultimately reducing the need for the expensive and increasingly scarce resources of the health care system.

- **Monitoring:** regular surveillance identifies emergence of diseases like H1N1, seasonal flu, meningitis or food poisoning outbreaks, and provides information on the most pressing health needs of a community.
- **Disease Prevention:** promoting and administering vaccinations against communicable diseases like flu and hepatitis B, needle exchange programs and supporting tainted food recalls.
- **Health Protection:** inspecting restaurants and drinking water systems to ensure safe food and water, containing disease outbreaks, and enforcing no-smoking laws. 24-hour on-call ensures quick response to emergencies including contaminated drinking water and chemical spills.
- **Health Promotion:** working with governments and other agencies to develop healthy public policy; building capacity within communities to maintain healthy environments; educating communities on healthy eating, physical activity, the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and illicit substance use and abuse; and supporting families to ensure healthy child and youth development, including reducing unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.



OPHA PROMOTES HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY

- Promotes a poverty reduction strategy to improve the health of the community.
- Advocates on air quality issues, contributing to the phase-out of coal-fired power plants.
- Promotes policy positions on key environmental health issues.
- Speaks out against corporal punishment of children.
- Advocates for keeping the LCBO public, ensuring the responsible sale of alcohol.
- Maintains the only Alcohol Policy Network in Canada, contributing expertise and informing the policy process in many regulated bodies and ministries of government.
- Advocated for maintaining a leading edge public health laboratory, the lack of which was evident during SARS.
- Influenced the creation of the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion.
- Pioneered efforts to ban cosmetic use of pesticides which is now widely accepted.
- Earned acknowledgement from Health Canada by leading Public Health sector demand for public information on mercury in fish.

OPHA PROVIDES PROVINCIAL PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS

- Provides training and consultation services for all of Ontario's 37 Heart Health partnerships.
- Recruits and trains community champions who address environmental issues to protect children's health.
- Sets new standards for youth engagement through exemplary "drink smart" projects such as keepcontrol.ca.
- Influences 120,000 Ontario mothers each year through a leading edge breastfeeding curriculum used in universities, community health centres and Tele-Health and public health units in Canada and internationally.
- Reviewed Student Nutrition Program Standards for Ontario's Ministry of Children and Youth Services to provide healthier meals for over 500,000 children every day.
- Published a research paper (Ethical Research and Evidence-Based Practice for Lesbians and Gay Men) that blazed an equity and access path for bi-sexuals and transsexuals seeking health care.
- Reached more than 40, 900 people by training 303 volunteer peer nutrition educators to deliver a Community Food Advisor Program.
- Launched the BusyBodies program on healthy eating and active living by placing 19,000 copies of its toolkit into the hands of Ontario's childcare providers.

OPHA, PUBLIC HEALTH AND YOU

Public Health is a system of organized efforts and safeguards designed to promote and protect health in populations. This is achieved by:

- Monitoring the status of health in communities.
- Promoting healthy behaviours.
- Addressing conditions and environments that affect health.
- Identifying, minimizing and eliminating health hazards.
- Investigating and managing disease outbreaks.
- Enforcing health protection laws.
- Responding to health related emergencies.

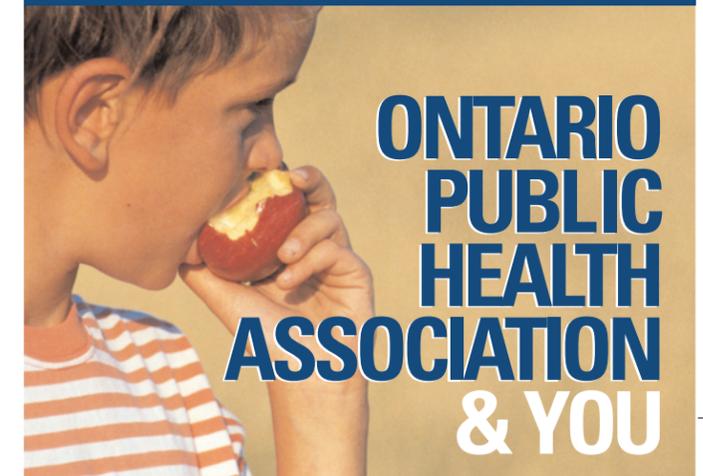
Public Health emphasizes the importance of disease prevention and poverty reduction as the best strategies for mitigating the costs of responding to illnesses.

OPHA INVITES YOU TO:

- Become a member of the OPHA.
- Attend our Annual Public Health Conference.
- Sponsor our annual Public Health Conference.
- Collaborate with us on Public Health initiatives.
- Participate as a volunteer on an OPHA workgroup.
- Become a Constituent Society of the OPHA.



THE VOICE OF PUBLIC HEALTH



LEADERSHIP THROUGH PARTNERSHIP
TOWARDS A HEALTHIER ONTARIO



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To join OPHA register on our web site at
www.opha.on.ca



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Ontario Public Health Association 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.



WE ARE: TRAILBLAZERS

a bold and independent voice within the Public Health sector ensuring that the diverse interests and needs of all Ontarians are articulated and respected in the decision-making process.

INNOVATORS

out-of-the-box thinkers consistently generating new ideas and approaches.

BRIDGE-BUILDERS

a critical link connecting Public Health professionals across geographical regions

COLLABORATORS

an inclusive and interdisciplinary organization that creates strategic partnerships to tackle competing Public Health priorities.

VISIONARIES

optimists and strategists working towards the eradication of preventable diseases, the preservation of the planet and creating healthy and thriving communities

TESTIMONIAL

"The good health of Ontarians is our greatest resource. The strength and success of our health care system—one of the best in the world—owes much to the calibre and dedication of our public health care practitioners. Since its founding in 1949, the OPHA has been the voice of its members, providing leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthening the skills and knowledge and impact of our public and community health care workers."

Premier Dalton McGuinty, November 2007

WHAT IS OPHA?

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is a unified, independent voice that engages governments, decision-makers, Public Health practitioners and all citizens committed to improving the health of Ontarians.

Through strategic collaborations with governments and partnerships with health units, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), addiction centres, academic institutions and community health centres, OPHA has succeeded in addressing and influencing the broader elements of health policy as well as a wide range of specific Public Health issues.

OPHA has served as a catalyst for strengthening Public Health—preserving the environment, promoting health, reducing health disparities, preventing disease and injury—since 1949. By fostering relationships with the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, the Ministry of Health Promotion and others, OPHA inspires governments and communities to manage Public Health challenges and initiatives with a steadfast focus on social responsibility.

OPHA promotes a broadly defined conception of Public Health and aims to lead health reform in Ontario by developing its capacity for policy analysis and advocacy with communities, politicians and other decision-makers committed to equity, social justice, inclusivity, diversity and the highest standards of openness and accountability.

OPHA maintains its influence at the policy-making table because of its uniquely interdisciplinary approach to Public Health. By leveraging the tools, perspectives and approaches of all Public Health disciplines, OPHA devises clear and consistent calls to action for governments and policy makers.

IMPACTS: OPHA WORKING FOR YOU...

OPHA plays a vital role in improving the health of Ontarians. The following is a partial list of our current activities and recent accomplishments. For details, visit www.opha.on.ca.

OPHA INFLUENCES GOVERNMENT HEALTH POLICY

- Participates in revisions of Ontario's Public Health Standards, laws and regulations.
- Made recommendations to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on Health Disparities and Accessibility that are now reflected in the Public Health Standard.
- Influenced the post-SARS Public Health Renewal Process with recommendations that are now being implemented.

OPHA SUPPORTS PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONS

- Leads the implementation of core competencies for Ontario's Public Health practitioners.
- Provides tools and processes to public health practitioners to support their use of currently available evidence and teaches practitioners to generate local evidence through evaluation.
- Provides programs, training, consultation and support to all Public Health Units in food security, chronic disease prevention, alcohol misuse, healthy eating and many more.
- Promotes diversity competence among Public Health professionals.
- Hosts Ontario's largest Annual Public Health Conference.
- Facilitates delivery of standardized services to the public by providing professional development opportunities, programs, to over 7000 Public Health professionals.



Members of Stolen from Africa youth group connect with OPHA members at the 2007 Annual Conference.