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July 29, 2003

To: The Hon. Anne McLellan, Canadian Federal Health Minister
The Hon. Tony Clement, Ontario Health Minister

Dear Ministers:

On behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) I am writing to applaud your work to date on the pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy.

OPHA, a voluntary organization representing over 3,000 practitioners of community and public health in Ontario, has provided leadership in public health since 1949. OPHA is concerned with the rapid increase in obesity among Canadians. It is for this reason that OPHA is asking that at the upcoming Ministers of Health meeting in Halifax on September 2-4, 2003 you endorse the recommendations for approval for the pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy. OPHA is calling for your endorsement of the Strategy and, more importantly, your immediate and long-term commitment to its implementation in order to ensure sustained support for the strategy.

Specifically, what we are calling you to do is to:

- Endorse the pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy
- Commit the required resources to turn this strategy into action
- Create an intersectoral committee to oversee the implementation of the strategy, and
- Ensure that the resulting actions are comprehensive: surveillance, research, policies and programs at all levels: national, provincial/territorial and local

OPHA is committed to chronic disease prevention and healthy living in Canada. We have been a part of the consultation process and would like the strategy to be followed through to action. It is only by implementing a plan of action that we can together reduce critical issues such as the obesity epidemic.

Immediate action includes your support to create an Intersectoral Committee that can guide implementation. The goals of healthy living and chronic disease prevention require

that the Health Sector work collaboratively with other sectors for success. Without coordinating the plans and desired outcomes of the departments of Education, Transportation, Finance, Agriculture, Recreation and Sport the goals for a healthy Canadian population cannot be met.

There is good work happening now in Canada but the investment is not sufficient and the efforts are uncoordinated in some areas. We have seen the need to strengthen Canada's ability to respond to infectious disease. A vibrant public health system would have the capacity to promote health and to prevent chronic diseases as well as being able to respond to infectious disease outbreaks.

The Healthy Living Strategy requires commitment to a comprehensive approach. We have learned from other issues, like tobacco control, that no one action will be effective on it's own. It is effective surveillance, research, policies and programs that will actually reduce obesity in Canada. These include policies and programs that focus on multiple risk factors and approaches implemented in multiple settings, addressing socio-behavioural risk factors and conditions. We need to ensure that investments will make a difference in the communities across this country. It is much easier to make healthy choices in healthy environments.

There are existing groups that can coordinate efforts in implementation. At the national level there is the Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada, a coalition of intersectoral public and not-for-profit organizations. At the provincial, territorial and local levels alliances and coalitions are bringing partners and systems together to develop and implement an integrated prevention system.

We call on your support to the pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy now. Many stakeholders have worked on this plan and this one needs to move forward. Thank you for all of your support and work on the Healthy Living Strategy to date. We have made significant progress together. We look forward to working further with you to create a healthy and prosperous future for all Canadians.

Sincerely

Connie Uetrecht
President