

A New Approach to Health – Improving the Health and Quality of Life of Ontarians



The voice of public health in Ontario since 1949.

Troubling Health Trends Need to be Reversed

Ontarians are living longer and benefiting from a health system envied by many. Yet, we are facing many disturbing trends that are affecting our health and threaten our long term well-being and quality of life. These trends include:

- the increasing costs of health care;
- a rapidly aging population expected to draw significantly on healthcare services;
- a shift from acute to chronic care with increasing rates of chronic diseases - half of Ontarians are affected by one or more chronic conditions;
- the economic burden of diabetes is expected to increase 42% over the next decade;
- an increase in unhealthy behaviors that can lead to chronic conditions - only 7% of children 5-11 and 4% of children 12-17 are physically active;
- almost 53% of Ontarians 12 and older are either overweight or obese and 30% of children are an unhealthy weight; and
- 19% of Ontarians aged 12 and older are smokers.

There is also a growing portion of those in Ontario that are at higher risk of poor health, especially those who are living in poverty, socially marginalized for various reasons, or disadvantaged. In addition, some regions of our province face these challenges more acutely.

However, Ontario has the opportunity to reverse these troubling trends, reduce public costs, and improve health outcomes.



OPHA's Commitment

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) believes that we should strive for the highest possible standard of health for all Ontarians. Further, we believe positive change is achievable through comprehensive health protection, promotion and prevention strategies. Our 1,000 plus members come from various backgrounds, disciplines and sectors. They have been leading change in their communities for more than 60 years, on issues such as tobacco control, poverty reduction, diabetes prevention, increased access to oral health care, immunization, supporting children and families, and designing walkable communities, among others.

We welcome the opportunity to work with leaders from all political parties and sectors to build on these successes to improve health while strengthening Ontario's economic prosperity and the quality of life of its residents. This document outlines four recommendations for achieving this.





Tackling the Root Causes of Poor Health



M More Health Care Does Not Lead to Better Health

Various research studies have shown that some 25 per cent of health care costs are due to preventable illnesses. Ontario's Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Arleen King, has concluded that, "as strong as our health care sector is, it cannot solve the problems that rob Ontarians of years of life and health. Instead, we must begin long before people become ill and seek health care – with the public health policies, programs and partnerships that help Ontarians protect and promote their health and prevent disease."

There is growing consensus that factors outside the health care system play a pivotal role in influencing one's health. These include policy decisions that contribute to increased rates of preventable diseases and injuries, driving up health care costs, increasing disparities and decreasing the economic potential of the province. Here are the conclusions of some key health and non-health organizations:

Canadian Medical Association:

"A multitude of studies have proven beyond a shadow of doubt that the key to a healthy population is tackling the social determinants of health... it's time to take this research seriously."

Conference Board of Canada:

"Most top performing countries have achieved better health outcomes through actions on the broader determinants of health."

Health Council of Canada:

"20% of health care spending is attributable to income disparities."

Senate Sub-Committee on Population Health:

"Reduction of inequalities and improvement to population health can only be tackled through a whole-of government approach that targets health disparities in all policies."



Tackling the Root Causes of Poor Health



Everyone Has a Role to Play

Health issues can no longer be solved in isolation; rather they will require working with other sectors. The types of interrelated policies and investments that can have a positive impact on health outcomes and quality of life range from adequate, affordable and safe housing, a living wage, access to higher education, poverty reduction measures, social assistance transition programs, employment training, food security, air quality, land use planning, water fluoridation, to access to affordable child care and early child development and recreational programs.

A recently released report by the Medical Officers of Health for Toronto, Peel, Simcoe Muskoka and Hamilton entitled, *Improving Health by Design in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area (GTHA)* revealed that “improvements in the ways communities are designed and integrate public transportation would result in the prevention of over 330 premature deaths and over 1,000 cases of diabetes each year across the GTHA.” With the rate of population growth, chronic disease trends and the pace of change in land use and transportation planning, they concluded that more needs to be done. As noted by Peel’s Medical Office of Health, Dr. David Mowat, “We have built our communities around the automobile and this approach poses a serious risk to public health.”

In looking at literacy issues among Aboriginal people, the Toronto Dominion Bank concluded that literacy is a key requirement of a knowledge based economy and “an essential component of social and human development – increased literacy produces better health outcomes, higher income, and improved communications with other people.”

Studies done on Ontario’s all-day kindergarten programs showed they contribute positively to child development as children in “all-day learning programs have stronger language development and better communication and social skills” and these programs help reduce parental stress.

What Gets Measured Gets Done

Ontario has invested heavily in measuring aspects of health care such as wait times, drug and patient use, quality and transparency. Limited emphasis has been placed on setting health goals and *developing* meaningful indicators to measure outcomes for health and well-being.

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has noted that “as long as incentives and reimbursements in the health care system remain primarily tied to treating diseases rather than promoting health outcomes, we will never effectively address (or properly encourage and reward) what contributes to good health in the first place.”

OPHA's Health and Well-being Plan

OPHA believes that we have the knowledge to resolve these challenges. Effective strategies and innovative models are already in place in various communities across Ontario, elsewhere in Canada and beyond. A new approach is needed - one that recognizes that improving and supporting the health, well-being, and productivity of Ontarians is the responsibility of all sectors and that public health has a unique role to play.

OPHA calls on leaders from all political parties to:

- 1. Legislate a Health in All Policies Approach***
- 2. Implement the Ontario Public Health Sector Plan***
- 3. Support Local Communities with a Healthy Ontario Fund***
- 4. Set Health Goals and Implement the Canadian Index of Well-being***

H Health in All Policies

This new legislation would require all ministries and public agencies to assess the health impact of their measures and consult with the Minister of Health to ensure any legislation, regulations, policies, programs and investments support the health and well-being of those living in Ontario. This legislation need not be an inhibitor to policy progress but an insurance policy against poor choices which will have negative consequences for public health and government finances. In fact, various provincial governments, such as British Columbia and Quebec as well as countries such as Australia, England and New Zealand among others, are already using this type of tool. It is time for Ontario to catch up.





OPHA's Health and Well-being Plan



Build on Ontario's Public Health Sector Plan

In her 2013 report “Make No Little Plans”, Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Arlene King laid out a bold plan to help make Ontarians the healthiest people in the world. The plan, built through consultation and collaboration with a diverse group of stakeholders, recognizes that the public health sector is uniquely positioned to provide a bridge between the health sector and other sectors that influence health. The blueprint, which calls for action in the five areas listed below, provides a solid foundation on which to build detailed action plans.

1. Optimize healthy human development
2. Improve the prevention and control of infectious diseases
3. Improve health by reducing preventable diseases and injuries
4. Promote healthy environments – both natural and built
5. Strengthen the public health sector’s capacity, infrastructure and emergency preparedness

Support Local Communities with a Healthy Ontario Fund

Leaders from different sectors are working together in new forums to improve the quality of life of their communities. They see how issues are interconnected and the path to local prosperity lies in new models of collaboration. Together they can achieve more than working in isolation.

Chatham-Kent’s Community Leaders’ Cabinet provides one such example. Leaders from the municipal council, business, labour, health, education, agriculture and the voluntary sector have come together to plan, develop and champion a healthy community. They recognize that the health and quality of life of their residents are determined by a range of factors and that good health improves workforce productivity, capacity for learning and enhances the quality of life of their community.

The OPHA calls on the Ontario Government to be a partner in this development of healthy communities by making strategic investments to support and expand successful models across the province.

OPHA's Health and Well-being Plan

S Set Health Goals and Implement the Canadian Index of Well-being

Various countries and international organizations such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have created measures that go beyond assessing the GDP; specifically indexes on national development and well-being. Over 15 years ago, various international and national indicator experts came together to create The Canadian Index of well-being.

The OPHA believes that by regularly assessing our living standards, the environment, community vitality, education, time use, democratic participation, access to and participation in leisure and culture as well as setting health goals, we could get a broader and more informative picture of how Ontario is doing in supporting public health and well-being.

C Conclusion

The OPHA calls on leaders from all political parties to support and build on what's working at the local and provincial level and launch new measures to support healthy communities.

The OPHA believes this plan will provide a foundation for reducing costs and improving the health and well-being.

