

May 17, 2006

Hon. George Smitherman  
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care  
80 Grosvenor St. 10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Hepburn Block  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 2C4

Dear Minister Smitherman,

Re: Capacity Review Committee Report

As members of the public health sector, we welcome the final report of the Capacity Review Committee (CRC), *Revitalizing Ontario's Public Health Capacity* and its recommendations.

This report is an important first step in addressing the deficiencies of our public health system.

Public health is a fundamental component of our health-care system in Ontario. The public health system has many roles to play, including managing and controlling infectious diseases, health promotion and injury prevention.

Mounting evidence shows that the future of public health in Ontario has reached a critical point and requires immediate action. The provincial government has clearly been paying attention to the reports that have resulted from the Walkerton and SARS experiences, and has implemented important new programs as a result. The CRC report will help move that good work forward and ensure the health protection and promotion of all Ontarians.

With the emergence of new diseases and health trends we are continually reminded that it is imperative to have a strong public health system to manage and control disease outbreaks and to protect and enhance health and safety in our communities.

Although we represent diverse groups dealing with public health in Ontario, we unanimously support the over-arching goal to improve Ontario's public health system. However, there are still issues which will need to be worked out and will require further development.

We believe that the revitalization of the public health workforce is a crucial issue that must be addressed immediately. One of the most critical areas is the high number of vacancies for medical officers of health. Having well-staffed public health units and making public health an attractive sector to engage in will ensure that communities will be able to prevent sickness and disease, and manage and control outbreaks.

Consensus on governance and funding of public health will vary among different health groups, however it is important that the government address both issues with the intention of finding best practices to ensure that public health can function at optimal efficiency and capacity.

It is clear that public health plays a vital role in our communities. By implementing accountability and performance measurements we can use these tools to raise the standard of public health in Ontario, using specific benchmarks that will help gauge improvements.

We also support the principle of building stronger health units. Local public health units are the heart of public health and the better they work, the stronger our system will be.

Lastly, strengthening research and knowledge exchange will help make Ontario a leader in terms of providing communities with the best tools and education needed to live healthy lives.

We believe that the CRC report is a step in the right direction. In particular, we feel it is necessary for an action plan to be developed for the implementation of changes to the public health system with an appropriate financial commitment.

Again, we applaud your efforts in rebuilding our public health system in Ontario and look forward to meeting with you to discuss how we can work together with the recommendations made in the CRC report.

We look forward to speaking with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

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Jeff Kwong, MD MSc CCFP  
Resident  
Community Medicine Residency Program  
University of Toronto

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Harvey Skinner PhD, CPsych  
Professor and Chair  
Public Health Sciences  
University of Toronto

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David B. Bach, MDCM, MFA, FRCPC  
President  
Ontario Medical Association (OMA)

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Dr. Garry Aslanyan  
President  
Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA)

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Adam Natsheh  
President  
Professional Association of Internes and Residents of Ontario (PAIRO)

Cc. Hon. Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario  
Hon. Jim Watson, Minister of Health Promotion  
Dr. Sheela Basrur, Chief Medical Officer of Health and Assistant Deputy Minister Public Health Division, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care