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June 6, 2006

Honourable George Smitherman  
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
80 Grosvenor St, 10th Flr, Hepburn Block  
Toronto ON M7A 2C4

Dear Minister Smitherman:

We are writing to urge you to implement the recommendations in the recently released "Revitalizing Ontario's Public Health Capacity: The Final Report of the Capacity Review Committee (CRC)". We believe that these recommendations will strengthen public health in the province, and will lead to a stronger, healthier Ontario for all residents.

The Committee's report offers clear direction for action on a number of urgent issues, including human resources, funding, accountability and governance. We strongly believe that the time has come for the government to act on these important recommendations. Ontarians need to feel confident that in the event of an urgent crisis along the lines of Walkerton, SARS or, potentially, pandemic influenza, public health will be ready and able to protect their health and safety. Ontarians also need to know that their government is working to promote health and help prevent chronic disease and injury in a concerted, collaborative and systematic manner.

The comprehensive human resources strategy, including marketing public health professions and strengthening professional development and leadership, is one of many recommendations which mirror those made by OPHA to the Committee last fall. OPHA, a non-profit association representing individual members and ten constituent societies in all areas of public health, is looking forward to working with the provincial government to implement this strategy.

Though the Committee did not spell out a detailed implementation plan in the report, they did set out some clear priorities for action. OPHA fully supports the prioritization and is pleased to see that the priorities we identified in our presentation to the Committee are reflected in the report's recommendations. In particular, the report recommends as its top priority:

- Development of a provincial public health human resources strategy, beginning with the marketing initiative, centralized workforce database, and efforts to increase enrollment in public health programs, including support for more training positions for public health physicians and dentists.

The shortage of professionals in all areas of public health is of grave concern, and OPHA strongly supports this recommendation. We are keenly aware of the need for a marketing strategy and for expanded supports for those in the public health workforce, including training and professional development.

OPHA also listed accountability and performance management as a priority in its recommendations; the Committee stated as its second priority:

- Adoption of a comprehensive performance management system for public health, beginning with the following elements: introduction of performance standards (with board standards as first priority); commitment to mandatory accreditation for all health units; and designation of a quality and performance specialist at every health unit.

This is a key area for OPHA; we contributed significantly to the current Mandatory Health Program and Service Guidelines and continue to work with our members on evolving and enhancing these guidelines.

We believe that the perspective of people who work and are leaders in the field can help guide the implementation of these recommendations forward. Because of OPHA's unique membership structure and composition, we speak on behalf of professionals and front-line workers across the breadth of the public health spectrum throughout the province. We believe we are, therefore, uniquely situated to assist in this task. In particular, our work in the areas of networking, leadership development and public health core competencies provides us with the skills, knowledge and experience needed to effect a positive collaboration in these areas.

OPHA is also well-linked to other organizations with whom we can work on these issues; in fact, OPHA recently partnered with the Ontario Medical Association, Department of Public Health Sciences and the Community Medicine Residency Program at the University of Toronto, and the Professional Association of Internes and Residents of Ontario (PAIRO) to commend the Capacity Review Committee and to urge you to act on the recommendations.

We would therefore like to offer to facilitate dialogue on the role that field practitioners can play in assisting the government in implementing the recommendations in the CRC's report, in particular in the areas of professional development and the development of a performance standard system. We will be following up with Dr. Basrur's office in the coming weeks.

In the meantime, congratulations on the excellent work done by the Committee.

Sincerely,

Dr. Garry Aslanyan  
President, OPHA

cc. Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier  
Honourable Jim Watson, Minister of Health Promotion  
Dr. Sheela Basrur, Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Dr. George Pasut, Executive Lead, Public Health System Transformation  
Dr. Susan Tamblyn, Chair, Capacity Review Committee  
Mr. Brian Hyndman, Co-Chair, Capacity Review Committee