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**Honorary Patron**

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**Constituent Societies**

ANDSOOHA – Public Health  
Nursing Management in Ontario

Association of Ontario  
Health Centres

Association of Public Health  
Epidemiologists in Ontario

Association of Supervisors of Public  
Health Inspectors of Ontario

Canadian Institute of Public  
Health Inspectors (Ontario Branch)

Community Health Nurses' Initiatives  
Group (RNAO)

Health Promotion Ontario:  
Public Health

Ontario Association of Public Health  
Dentistry

Ontario Public Health Libraries  
Association

Ontario Society of Nutrition  
Professionals in Public Health

Public Health Research, Education  
and Development (PHRED)  
Program

Charitable Registration  
Number 11924 8771 RR0001

May 12, 2005

Ujjal Dosanjh  
Minister of Health  
Minister's Office Health Canada  
Brooke Claxton Bldg., Tunney's Pasture  
P.L. 0906C  
Ottawa ON K1A 0K9

Dear Minister,

Re: Children's Environmental Health

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is a voluntary, non-profit organization representing over 3000 individuals and constituent societies from various sectors and disciplines working in public and community health. Our mission is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health and to strengthen the impact of people active in community and public health throughout Ontario. We achieve this through education, communication, advocacy, issue identification, public health expertise and consultation.

In recent years the OPHA has been very active on environmental health issues, with a focus on children's environmental health. The OPHA recognizes and values the work done by your government in this area and would like to meet with you or members of your staff around the issue of children's environmental health – a topic that cuts across multiple disciplines and jurisdictions.

At the OPHA Annual General Meeting held in November 2004, our membership adopted three position papers and related resolutions that pertain to children's environmental health. These papers, which are attached, raise a number of issues that are relevant in the federal context, examples of which are listed below the title of each document.

1. Paper on Balancing and Communicating Issues Related to Environmental Contaminants in Breast Milk
  - o Public health officials, doctors, midwives and public require improved access to up-dated, useful and balanced information on the benefits of breast milk and the risks of environmental contaminants in breast milk and infant feeding products.

- Ongoing public monitoring of and research into the effects of environmental contamination on children at all stages of development is needed; and
  - Collaboration is needed on this issue between the federal Ministers of Health and Environment and other Ministers or Departments as appropriate with respect to those populations that are specifically and/or severely impacted (e.g. First Nations).
2. Paper on Fish Consumption with respect to Methylmercury Content, by Pregnant Women, Women of Childbearing Age and Young Children
- There is a need for monitoring and surveillance of food intake by Canadians, including detailed information about fish consumption patterns in Canada and mercury levels in fish sold in Canada;
  - International, and particularly North American, coordination is needed in order to create consistent and effective fish advisory guidelines;
  - Guidelines are needed to mandate labeling and point of purchase signage for high mercury fish; and
  - Mercury emissions into the environment must be significantly reduced.
3. Paper on Childhood lead exposure and housing sources: Does a problem exist in Ontario?
- There is a need for Canadian exposure data on childhood blood lead levels and its connection to housing sources;
  - Research is needed on residential sources of lead in Canadian housing and to determine the vintage of housing that poses the greatest risk of lead exposure; and
  - Canada is in need of standards for lead levels in interior dust that are protective of children.

The OPHA values the work being done by the federal government with respect to the health of Canadians. We applaud the government's decision to allocate \$90 million dollars of this year's federal budget toward the review of toxic substances. At the same time, more action is needed in the realm of children's environmental health. Our present focus on the issues of lead, mercury and environmental contaminants in breast milk reflects our belief that these are issues on which action can and should be taken and that they are issues on which dialogue between the federal government and other stakeholders is important.

We look forward to a meeting with you and your staff to discuss our concerns in more detail and ask you to contact the Chair of the OPHA Environmental Health Workgroup, Theresa Schumilas at (519) 883-2254 or [stheresa@region.waterloo.on.ca](mailto:stheresa@region.waterloo.on.ca) to arrange that meeting.

Sincerely,

Dr. Garry Aslanyan  
President, Ontario Public Health Association

cc. Connie Uetrecht, OPHA Executive Director  
Theresa Schumilas