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Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001

August 10, 2006

Minister Jim Watson
Office of the Minister
Ministry of Health Promotion
35th Floor, 250 Yonge Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2N5

Dear Minister Watson:

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) commends you and your Ministry staff on the recent release of *Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living*. The public health community welcomes these first steps in the creation of comprehensive strategies to keep Ontarians healthy and address the burden of illness posed by poor eating habits, low levels of physical activity and overweight. We look forward to working with you on the implementation of the 14 actions identified in your plan.

Our association is very pleased to see that you have focused action on a variety of health promotion strategies, including building healthy communities, public policy, public awareness and engagement, all with a focus on children and youth.

We are particularly pleased to see your enhanced efforts to support healthy schools. OPHA is the secretariat to the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition who have spent many years advocating for the provincial implementation of a healthy schools program. We hope that as you revise the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines this fall, you will incorporate a clear mandate for public health to collaborate with school communities to create healthier schools.

As you may know, "Eat Smart!" is a program provincially coordinated by the Nutrition Resource Centre at OPHA. Our staff, as well as the public health practitioner, looks forward to the opportunity to expand Eat Smart! into workplaces, recreation facilities and schools as well as to continue the restaurant component of the program.

Further, addressing the socio-economic determinants of health is a key advocacy focus of OPHA. The program to increase access to vegetables and fruit in the North and your work with the Aboriginal communities on healthy eating and active living are two good examples of measures to address the determinants of health.

It is through the development and implementation of healthy public policy that major achievements will be made in improving the health of Ontarians, and we are pleased to see that your plan pays attention to this important strategy. OPHA, through our Food Security Work Group, has previously advocated for returning the clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement to low income clients so they can afford to purchase healthy foods and engage in physical activity. We would encourage your government to implement this healthy public policy as it would support your plan by contributing significantly to improvement in the diets of people on social assistance.

We understand that you are building this strategy with a beginning investment of \$10 million; over the next years we recommend that you increase that investment to \$19 million and beyond. There are many more actions to be taken to reduce the burden of illness due to poor eating habits and physical inactivity. While an investment that focuses on children and youth is a good first step, we must also turn attention to the adult population to reduce the burden of chronic diseases as our population ages.

Our association looks forward to working with your Ministry now and in the future to improve the health of the population.

Sincerely,

Garry Aslanyan
President

c.c. Dr. Sheela Basrur, Medical Officer of Health and Assistant Deputy Minister
Ms. Marg Rappolt, Deputy Minister
Ms. Lisa Watson, Director
Mr. Peter Fonseca, Parliamentary Assistant
Dr. Shafiq Qaadri, Parliamentary Assistant