



Ontario Public Health Association
 l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario
 Established/Établi 1949

The mission of OPHA is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health and to strengthen the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario.

44 Victoria Street
 Suite 502
 Toronto, ON M5C 1Y2

Tel: (416) 367-3313
 Fax: (416) 367-2844
 E-mail: admin@opha.on.ca
www.opha.on.ca

President
 Larry Stinson
 E-mail: president@opha.on.ca

Executive Director
 Pegeen Walsh
 E-mail: pwalsh@opha.on.ca

Constituent Societies

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

Ontario Association of Public Health Dentistry

Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health

The Ontario Association of Public Health Nursing Leaders

*Charitable Registration
 Number 11924 8771 RR0001*

February 19, 2016

The Honourable Amarjeet Sohi
 Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
 180 Kent Street
 Suite 1100
 Ottawa, Ontario K1P 0B6

Dear Minister Sohi,

RE: MAKING HEALTHY IMPACTS PART OF FEDERAL INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDS

On behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), we are writing to bring to your attention the opportunity you and your federal colleagues have to improve health in communities through your government's commitment to invest in community infrastructure. We respectfully request that you include improving population health as an objective for infrastructure funding, and that you include health-promoting design criteria in the application and review process.

Created in 1949, OPHA is a not-for-profit organization committed to providing leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthening the impact of public health in Ontario. Our mission is achieved by providing professional development, evidence-based information, analysis on public health issues, access to multi-disciplinary networks, advocacy on healthy public policy and expertise and consultation.

Much public health work in Ontario focuses on the built environment, which includes the buildings, housing, parks, schools, road systems, and other infrastructure that we encounter in our daily lives.¹ The built environment and transportation systems have a significant influence on health outcomes such as incidence of diabetes, traffic related injuries, and respiratory and cardiac illnesses related to air quality.¹

The built environment and the infrastructure of which it is comprised powerfully affect our health. One of the most significant health promoting components is whether people can conveniently, safely and affordably travel using modes other than private automobile. The most researched effect, and arguably the most important, is upon physical activity, but the built environment also affects air quality, safety and social connectivity. In Ontario, physical inactivity has been shown to result in a two-year decrease in life expectancy and a 3.4 year decrease in the number of years of good health.¹ Physical inactivity also contributes to higher risk of several chronic diseases including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and several forms of cancer.

Replacing car trips by walking, cycling and using transit can help people to be active in today's busy life, and many communities in Ontario are focusing efforts on diversifying their transportation infrastructure. They recognize that making active transportation and transit viable options can improve health, equity and safety, and also contribute to sustainability and economic goals.

The mandate letters to the federal Minister of Transportation and Minister of Infrastructure and Communities both reference the importance of working with provinces and municipalities to improve infrastructure.ⁱ, ⁱⁱ They highlight principles that are aligned with the promotion of population health, including emphasis on public transit, green infrastructure, and social infrastructure like affordable housing. In addition, the use of population health criteria can support the identification of priority projects.

The Government of Canada has committed significant funding for infrastructure over the next ten years, including the provision of funds to municipalities for roads, public transit and community facilities through Infrastructure Canada.ⁱⁱⁱ This funding presents an ideal opportunity to create more health-promoting community and transportation system design. While the currently identified objectives are commendable (economic growth, a clean environment, and stronger communities), we recommend that improving population health also be added as an objective, and that the following be included as criteria for receiving infrastructure funding:

- Inclusion of healthy community concepts such as "complete communities" design principles
- Inclusion of infrastructure for active transportation in transport systems funding
- Prioritization of public transit infrastructure that improves accessibility and affordability
- Ensuring protection and/or expansion of green space and sensitive lands
- Improvement of health equity by requiring affordable housing and access to healthy food when building communities
- Improving drinking water quality for all communities

At a provincial level, the Government of Ontario has taken steps to invest in healthy community design and transportation systems. Recent actions include development of the #CycleON strategy and funding for cycling infrastructure and education, as well as updates to the Provincial Policy Statement, which provides direction for local planning. Specifically, the Provincial Policy Statement speaks to the characteristics of "healthy, livable and safe communities" and of their importance.^{iv} Provincial planning documents such as the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe identify active transportation and healthy, active complete communities as priorities. At a municipal level, we know that there is growing local interest in creating walk- and bike-friendly communities, but that municipalities need federal and provincial funding support in order to build infrastructure that creates a complete, connected, multi-modal transportation network.

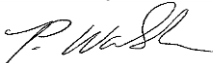
Across Ontario, public health staff is engaged in partnerships with municipalities and other community stakeholders to promote, advocate and plan for healthy transportation systems and healthy community design. Funding through Infrastructure Canada could serve as a significant opportunity to make infrastructure improvements that will promote health and demonstrate federal leadership on creating healthier communities. In order to achieve this outcome, funding criteria must include impacts on public health, safety and equity. We recommend that population health be

added as an objective for infrastructure funds, and that health criteria be included in the application process and review.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further. Please feel free to contact me or Sue Shikaze, Co-chair, OPHA's Built Environment Workgroup at sshikaze@hkpr.on.ca or by calling 705-457-1391 x3249 if you have questions or require clarification.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely



Pegeen Walsh
Executive Director

ⁱ Office of the Prime Minister. Minister of Transport Mandate Letter. <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-transport-mandate-letter#sthash.wKwmuzQG.dpuf>

ⁱⁱ <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-transport-mandate-letter#sthash.wKwmuzQG.dpuf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Government of Canada, I. C. (2015-05-25). Infrastructure Canada - New Building Canada Plan. Retrieved January 15, 2016, <http://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/plan/plan-eng.html#new> <http://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/plan/plan-eng.html#new>

^{iv} Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Land Use Planning – Provincial Policy Statement, 2005. <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page1485.aspx#preamble>