



Ontario Public Health Association

l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario

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**The Ontario Public Health
Association's
2015 Pre-Budget
Submission to
Ontario's Minister of Finance**

February 13, 2015

Overview:

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) applauds the Ontario Government's commitment to being activist leaders in building a prosperous, fairer and healthier Ontario. OPHA has a long history of sharing these goals and believes they can be achieved by creating the conditions for healthy individuals and communities and by reducing economic disparities. As former TD Bank President Ed Clark has concluded, the growing income gap is not just unfair, but corrosive to society.¹ Less apparent is how it is also contributing to increased health care costs.

We recognize the government's concern about fiscal prudence. Placing more emphasis on creating a healthier population will contribute to Ontario's prosperity, generate health care savings, and achieve our shared goal of creating a fairer society.

Our non-profit organization brings together a broad spectrum of groups and individuals concerned about people's health – from the various disciplines in public health, health care, academic, non-profit and private sectors.

We welcome the opportunity to convey the views and recommendations of our members about ways to create a fairer society, improve health and wellbeing and save health care costs. These measures can also contribute to growing the province's economic prosperity and reducing the deficit.

Recommendations:

OPHA urges the government to consider the following recommendations:

1. Adopt Health-in-all-Policies Legislation
2. Maintain and Enhance Laws, Regulations and Investments in Health Promotion, Protection and Prevention
3. Set Targets for Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy
4. Support a Shift to Wellness and the Creation of a Provincial Wellness Strategy

More details about these recommendations and the rationale are outlined on the following pages.

Rationale:

1. Adopt Health-in-all-Policies Legislation

A Health-in-all-Policies (HIAP) approach recognizes that public policies beyond health care have potential to impact the health of the population and therefore health care costs. HIAP allows governments to take an “upstream approach” to creating the conditions for better health. It starts by adopting legislation that would require each provincial ministry to **assess** any new policies, legislation, regulations and programs for their possible effects on the population’s health and well-being prior to their adoption and implementation.

The health consequences would be assessed at each phase - from research, analysis, planning and decision making. This type of review can help mitigate any potential harms, optimize health outcomes and contribute to real savings in health care costs.

Quebec and British Columbia are already doing this as are various jurisdictions around the world. The World Health Organization identified Act Now BC, for example, as a best practice for health promotion and chronic disease prevention.²

The mandate letters issued by Ontario’s Premier to each provincial minister already requires collaborative work across ministries. A HIAP or “whole of government” approach would formalize this system, strengthen its impact and effectiveness and contribute to achieving health equity. It would also do so within any budgetary framework that is set out, at a minimal expense.

2. Maintain and Enhance Laws, Regulations and Investments in Health Promotion, Protection and Prevention

Small Investment, Big Impact

Within MOHLTC’s almost \$50B annual budget, only some \$744M goes to support Ontario’s 36 public health units and under \$400M supports health promotion strategies—amounts that have stayed relatively comparable over the past several years.

Ontario’s 2014 budget called for a “shift of spending...to where Ontario will get the best value for our health care dollars”. Yet among the nine of last year’s new measures related to health, only one dealt with a public health focus – the integration of dental services to change the way health care services are funded.

With its mandate to protect and enhance health, prevent the onset of disease and premature death of Ontarians at all stages of life, public health is well placed to take an upstream approach

and tackle the underlying determinants of health and illness. Public health units (PHUs) are uniquely and strategically located for working with various sectors to advocate for, raise awareness about and collaborate with others at the local level to reduce the effects of the social determinants of health. For example, they have been convening cross-sectoral action groups to tackle issues ranging from school health, poverty reduction, food security, the built environment, workplace health to health and the environment.

In addition, PHUs are tracking and containing infectious diseases; preventing chronic diseases, injuries and substance abuse; promoting healthy child development, and family, community and environmental health; and, engaging in emergency preparedness and management.

As your government implements its commitment to achieve a balanced budget by 2017-18 and reviews the role of LHINS, CCACS and PHUs, protect and enhance current funding for health promotion and public health as a frugal investment. Experts have noted that Ontario has fallen behind British Columbia and Quebec when it comes to population health outcomes and per capita spending on public health and prevention strategies.³ These areas warrant further investment.

Regulations Can Save Lives and Health Care Costs

Many government laws and regulations such as those dealing with tobacco control, road safety to the price and accessibility of alcohol protect and promote Ontarians health.

We are heartened by the introduction of new measures, for example, on tobacco use restrictions, The Making Healthier Choices Act 2014, distracted driving as well as the continued support for existing health related regulations such as those controlling the sale and distribution of alcohol. With pressure to support greater consumer choice, the costs or harms of alcohol misuse, estimated in 2002 at \$14.6 billion annually in health care and social costs at a national level, are too often overlooked.⁴

Health Promotion Strategies Save Health Care Costs

There are potential savings to be achieved by reducing injuries and various chronic diseases. In 2012, for example, the Ontario Auditor General called on MOHLTC to enhance the focus on diabetes prevention and early detection, to “assess whether an investment of only 3% in prevention was effective, develop comprehensive strategies and assess strategies used in other provinces.” Unfortunately, the AG’s 2014 report noted its recommendations were still in the process of being implemented.

It is estimated that 1.46 million people in Ontario are living with diabetes; this is expected to increase to 2.2 million over the next decade. As experts have concluded that over 50% of type 2

diabetes could be prevented or delayed, current prevention investments should be maintained and more aggressive efforts made to shift to a more upstream approach.⁵

Ontario's investments through the Tobacco Control Act and Smoke-free Ontario Act, for example, have resulted in a decline of smoking prevalence from 50 per cent in the 1960's to about 18 per cent today.⁶ The Smoke-free Strategy represents one of Ontario's few comprehensive health promotion strategies. With approximately 13,000 Ontarians dying each year from tobacco use⁷ and the reduction in smoking rates slowing, continued as well as enhanced investments are needed to support new initiatives (e.g. comprehensive cessation services) and make further gains.

Oral Health Investments Can Take a Bite Out of Emergency Care Costs

Consider the potential savings of extending public oral health programs to low-income adults or supporting a provincial water fluoridation program. In 2012, for example, there were almost 58,000 visits to hospital Emergency Rooms (ER) for oral health problems across Ontario. The Association of Ontario Health Centres estimated the total cost for dental visits to ER in Ontario in 2012 was at least \$30 million.⁸ Despite these expenditures, dental issues are not necessarily being solved nor are the root causes being addressed. Many people are using costly acute care ER because they cannot afford dental treatment.

Quebec's provincial water fluoridation program was found in a 2013 study to be the most effective means of preventing caries and reducing oral health inequalities, saving some \$71.05–\$82.83 per person in dental costs for each dollar invested.⁹ Ontario's former Chief Medical Officer of Health, in her 2012 report, *Oral Health - More than Just Cavities*, recommended a review of policies and mechanisms to ensure that all Ontarians have access to optimally fluoridated drinking water.

3. Set Targets for Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy

Health is more than health care - over 50% of one's health status is attributed to factors outside the health care system, to the social determinants of health – income, education and early childhood development to name but a few. In 2009, the Senate Sub-Committee on Population Health noted that, “poor health outcomes are more likely among: children and families living in poverty; the working poor; the unemployed/ underemployed; those with limited education and/or low literacy; Aboriginal and remote populations; newcomers; persons suffering from social exclusion; the homeless; and those who have difficulty securing affordable housing.”¹⁰

Your government has already taken critical steps to reduce poverty and increase income security- investments in all day kindergarten, increasing minimum wage and wages for early child care workers and the development of a provincial pension plan. These provide an

important foundation for promoting health and fairness and we urge your government to go further.

Minister Hoskins remarked during the release of his new health plan that “health is the bedrock of social progress”. While a high quality health care system is fundamental, a shift is needed so that more emphasis is placed on health protection, prevention, health promotion and wellness and, most importantly, addressing the factors that most significantly contribute to health.

It’s been said that that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. Investing in prevention is an investment in those conditions that create and support a fairer and healthier Ontario - affordable housing, adequate income that provides the resources needed for health, education and skill development across the lifespan, good jobs, healthy and safe working conditions and child care to support families’ participation in the workforce.

Experts have concluded that more gains can be made in improving health through decreasing economic disparities than investing in health care.¹¹ For example, if all Ontarians had the same health as Ontarians with higher income, an estimated 318,000 fewer people would be in fair or poor health... and there would be an estimated 3,373 fewer deaths each year among Ontarians living in metropolitan areas.¹²

A December 2014 OECD Report on Inequality and Growth noted that, “when income inequality rises, economic growth falls (and) tackling inequality can make our societies fairer and our economies stronger”. It concluded that “policies that can limit or reverse inequality may not only make societies fairer, but also wealthier”.¹³ A 2012 Conference Board of Canada report on this topic went further by noting that income inequality has increased over the last 20 years; this reality “can diminish economic growth”... “undermine social cohesion” and raises “questions about fairness and social justice”.¹⁴

Targeted investments under Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy can save health care costs in the long-term will also improving health, economic and societal outcomes.

4. Support a Shift to Wellness and the Creation of a Provincial Wellness Strategy

Investing in comprehensive health promotion strategies, upstream policies and programs that will help to prevent chronic disease, can reduce demand on the health care system and help save hundreds of millions of dollars in health care costs. It will improve the province’s economic productivity and prosperity and the quality of life of every person in Ontario who can avoid preventable diseases.

OPHA is encouraged by the new Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and Wellness’ mandate to build a culture of health and community wellness, including supports and programs, to help people stay healthy. Comprehensive strategies are needed that can create the conditions for achieving health and wellness and remove barriers created by income

disparities and other factors (e.g. access to affordable and nutritious food, affordable and safe housing, employment and working conditions).

The business sector has also recognized the value of upstream approaches as well as the economic consequences of not doing so. Canada's TD Bank, for example, in a 2010 report entitled, "Charting a Path to Sustainable Health Care in Ontario", predicted that if Ontario does not start investing in health promotion, policies and programs to prevent chronic disease instead of just focusing on treatment, health care costs could take up 80 per cent of the province's budget by 2030. It concluded that a healthier population is less costly to serve, and prevention is a key part of a more sustainable health system in Ontario.¹⁵ The 2012 Drummond Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services also arrived at a similar conclusion.¹⁶

Conclusion

A shift to prevention and upstream approaches can offer significant savings, contribute to Ontarians health and wellbeing and help build a fairer and more prosperous society.

OPHA's members come from various backgrounds, disciplines and sectors. They have been leading change in their communities on issues such as tobacco control, poverty reduction, diabetes prevention, increased access to oral health care, immunization, supporting children and families, food security, climate change and designing walkable communities, among others.

We welcome the opportunity to work with your government to build on these successes to create positive change by improving health, reducing disparities while strengthening Ontario's economic prosperity and the quality of life of its residents.

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