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February 26, 2003

**To: The Honorable Landon Pearson The Senate of Canada**

Dear Senator Landon Pearson:

We are writing on behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) Liaison, [Child Health Workgroup](#), and the [Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition](#) in response to your request for input regarding the development of Canada's National Plan of Action for children.

Initially, we would like to acknowledge your leadership in promoting children's rights in Canada and across the world. Your commitment to moving the national plan to action is very commendable.

We strongly support the need to advocate for the health of children in our nation. Of particular concern identified in the national plan is the need to eradicate child poverty and increase resiliency. Child poverty is a devastating public health issue and a direct threat to the health of our children that requires a broad social and political agenda to address. The OPHA Child Health Workgroup and OPHA Healthy Schools Workgroup/ Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition propose that the national plan of action for children include the following goals and recommendations:

1. Increase equity and reduce child poverty by an improved tax structure for single earners, by enhanced child benefits, and by increased government responsibility for enforcing alimony agreements and child support payments;
2. Support families with high quality, affordable childcare, with family friendly work environments, and with nurse home visiting programs for families of newborns;
3. Invest in education, health and welfare by creating a national social investment fund to replace the Canada Health & Social Transfer program. This fund should contain at least 1% of Federal government revenues for programs that support child development, and secure an accessible comprehensive range of services for children. These services should include dedicated funding for universal junior kindergarten, and universal family drop-in centres for caregivers of preschoolers and their children;
4. Institute Economic and Labour policies that protect children through: creating "better jobs" and better working conditions; cutting unemployment in half; improving unemployment

insurance; and legislating that overtime work hours be paid 1 ½ times the regular rate;

5. Ensure adequate housing by increasing financial support from federal and provincial governments for social housing and co-op housing units; and,
6. Make child development a priority policy area by instituting national standards and indicators for child health and social support and services, such as the "Wall Street Index", which is a list of 11 measures of how children are faring, including the low birth weight rate, percentage of children entering kindergarten who are not ready for school, and length of waiting lists for subsidized day care.

The OPHA Healthy Schools Workgroup/ Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition also urges better cooperation between the health and education sectors and others to support schools and children. Since the school system plays an important role in promoting the health of children, and public health units provide a variety of preventive and health-promoting programs and services, their partnership is necessary. The research indicates that comprehensive approaches to school-based health promotion such as "Comprehensive School Health" or "Health Promoting Schools" are cost effective for reducing illness and building attitudes and behaviours that are important for healthy living. These approaches have been shown to contribute to academic success and optimal child and youth development, which are determinants of future health, economic security and quality of life.

Again, we commend you for your efforts to move forward the national plan of action for children and thank you for the opportunity to provide input. We look forward to hearing further about your work.

Yours sincerely,

Barbara G. Ronson  
Co-chair, Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition

Carol MacDougall  
Co-chair, Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition

Ruth Schofield  
Chair, OPHA Child Health Workgroup