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Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001

November 21, 2001

To: The Honourable Tony Clement
M.P.P. Brampton West
Minister of Health and Long Term Care

Re: Concern about Termination of Ontario Heart Health Program

Dear Minister Clement:

The mission of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is to strengthen the impact of people who are active in community and public health through Ontario. OPHA achieves this through education, advocacy, issue identification, public health expertise, and consultation in public and community health. OPHA represents the collective interests of approximately 3,000 individuals in public and community health through individual and constituent society memberships.

At its recent Annual General Meeting, the membership of OPHA voted to express its support of the Ontario Heart Health Program (OHHP) and to express concern regarding the Program's upcoming termination.

The OHHP, launched in 1998, is a \$17 million (\$3.4 million per year for five years) provincial program designed to address the three leading modifiable risk factors (smoking, physical inactivity and unhealthy eating) associated with heart disease. Since the program's inception, public health and community partners have been working together in 37 health unit areas across the province to promote healthy living, provide behaviour change opportunities, build supportive environments and influence healthy policy. The current OHHP structure facilitates an impressive return for investment by leveraging involvement of community partners and by reducing the burden of illness and treatment costs for chronic disease. The OHHP currently offers approximately 500 activities across Ontario.

Under the current OHHP guidelines, communities must invest a minimum of \$2 for every \$1 contributed by the MOHLTC. During the 1998/99 fiscal year, communities contributed over \$10 million as in-kind support and by the 2000/01 fiscal year,

the community contribution increased to \$11 million. This represents an average investment of 3.9 local dollars for every one provincial dollar.

The OHHP also provides an opportunity for community partner and volunteer involvement. In the 1998/99 fiscal year over 1,100 groups were members of the heart health partnerships across the province. This grew to 2,500 groups by 2000/01 fiscal year.

The OHHP has the capacity to become the system by which all chronic disease prevention messages including cancer, diabetes, stroke as well as heart disease, are delivered. An integrated approach reduces the duplication of effort at the local level, maximizes opportunities for joint initiatives and respects the unique programming needs of each disease prevention area. This reduces the competition for limited community resources while promoting a comprehensive and integrated approach to healthy living and disease prevention.

OPHA would appreciate your assurances that the OHHP will not be terminated and that sustainable funding will be made available. The OHHP communities are planning for their final year right now, and unless funding is extended many communities will commence terminating their activities. **Immediate action is necessary to prevent this loss.**

Yours truly,

Connie Uetrecht
President, OPHA