

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Silence kills: why OPHA is urging political parties to get loud about their commitments to protect and promote the public's health

Oshawa, Ontario – The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is sounding an alarm around the fact that the future of our public health system has not been made a priority by political parties, thus potentially putting at risk the health of Ontarians. Deep financial cuts in 2019-20 followed by a pandemic that has pushed public health beyond capacity for over two years has led to severe consequences in other areas of health that communities rely on; including immunization, school health, food safety, infectious and communicable disease prevention and control, and chronic disease prevention, among others. OPHA is calling attention to what is needed for a strong public health system that can meet current and future demands. OPHA urges all political parties to commit to action around key priorities of great importance to the public's health.

In their [2022 Election Priorities document](#) released today, OPHA is calling on all political parties to commit to sufficient funding, bold policies and proven approaches that prevent chronic disease, advance racial and health equity and address climate change and its impacts on health and well-being; all of which have taken a back seat during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“All political parties should be talking about the future of public health right now. After two years of an intense COVID-19 response, we find ourselves at a critical juncture for public health. Our system has experienced a backlog in essential health programs and services that promote and protect the health of Ontarians” said John Atkinson, OPHA’s Executive Director. “With strong commitments to rebuild and sustain the public health system and workforce, prioritize racial and health equity, invest in the prevention of chronic disease, and address climate change and its impacts on health, we can work together to ensure a healthy, just and sustainable future for Ontarians.”

Five priority areas for action topped the list for over 400 frontline community and public health experts when recently sharing their perspectives on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and needs for the future of public health in Ontario. Their thoughts are captured in the paper [What We Heard: Report on Public Health Professionals and the COVID-19 Pandemic Response](#), which offers important insights for enhancing preparedness and for building a strong and resilient public health system. The report illustrates how the reduction and cessation of critical public health programs and services (in response to dealing with the pandemic) has negatively impacted the health of individuals and communities, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized.

Ontarians should be worried about capacity in the public health sector. “In 2019, the province introduced an aggressive modernization plan for public health, which included changes to the provincial cost-sharing formula” said Kevin Churchill, OPHA Board of Directors Vice President and Advocacy Committee Chair. “The effects of widespread reductions in public health resources would have been catastrophic in the face of the emerging pandemic. Increasing and sustaining funding, while enabling local and regional autonomy is key to the future of public health in Ontario.”

We are experiencing the worst public health crisis in more than a century, impacting the lives, health, and well-being of our population. There are key areas that will make a big difference in equipping Ontario's leaders and the public health workforce for tackling the complex societal challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. The priority areas span several critical topics, as does the mandate of public health in Ontario which is more than infection control and emergency response.

OPHA's election priorities outline 17 calls to action within the five crucial areas outlined below.

1. Strengthen public health and community health by increasing and sustaining funding, while enabling local and regional autonomy
2. Restore and strengthen the public health workforce
3. Advance racial and health equity
4. Take bold actions to address climate change
5. Develop and implement a comprehensive chronic disease prevention strategy

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About the Ontario Public Health Association:

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is a non-partisan, charitable, non-profit organization that brings together a broad spectrum of groups and individuals concerned about people's health. OPHA's members come from various backgrounds and sectors - from the various disciplines in public health, health care, academic, non-profit to the private sector. They are united by OPHA's mission of providing leadership on issues affecting the public's health and strengthening the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario.

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