



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.

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

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Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001

Dr. Kieran Moore
Chief Medical Officer of Health
Ministry of Health of Ontario
Office of Chief Medical Officer of Health, Public Health
393 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
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May 17, 2023

Dear Dr. Moore:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities in reproductive health, and the OPHA's Reproductive Health Workgroup feels that there is a unique opportunity at this time for a renewed focus on development and delivery of public health programs related to reproductive health. As the Chairs of the Ontario Public Health Association's Reproductive Health Workgroup, Dr. Hilary Brown, Deanna Stirling, Dr. Andi Camden, and I would like to share with you a document describing the need for and importance of greater consideration of reproductive health in the Ontario Public Health Standards, including the protocols and/or guidelines. We appreciate the opportunity to raise issues related to this topic, and respectfully ask you to consider the ways in which issues related to reproductive health might be better reflected in the Standards.

In the attached document titled "*Inclusion of Reproductive Health in the Ontario Public Health Standards*" you will find more details about changes to how reproductive health was prioritized since the 2014 Standards. This version of the Standards supported the creation of equitable and accessible reproductive health programs and services across Ontario, including preconception health promotion and prenatal education. However, the current Standards do not explicitly articulate the essential components of reproductive health programs which has created the conditions for program and service erosion, as well as inconsistent and inequitable access across jurisdictions.

The document provided is grounded in evidence and reflects the real-world experiences of OPHA's Reproductive Health Workgroup members, who represent public health nurses, nurse managers, health promotion specialists, physicians, and researchers across Ontario. Workgroup members from local public health units have told us that the absence of specific recommendations around reproductive health in the Standards has led to inadequacies in reproductive health services and programs offered in the province; limited preconception and prenatal programming (which is mostly online); and major losses of funding to trusted sources of reproductive health information, including the Best Start Resource Centre. At the next opportunity to update the standards, its protocols and/or guidelines, we urge the government to

consider three key changes that will support the equitable delivery of programs addressing reproductive health. Specifically, we recommend that:

- The Healthy Growth and Development Standards include a core set of reproductive health indicators to be routinely collected and analyzed
- The language related to programs for infant feeding, healthy pregnancy, mental health, preconception health, pregnancy counseling, and parenting preparation be changed from “based on assessment of local needs” to “required”
- Other important aspects of reproductive health, such as preconception health and preparation for labour and birth, be given greater attention throughout the Standards, including their protocols and/or guidelines

Furthermore, in the interim, we welcome the opportunity for OPHA’s Reproductive Health Workgroup to contribute to any revisions or expansion upon the Healthy Growth and Development Guideline (2018). Beginning to address language in the Standards that more specifically considers reproductive health, as well as consistent indicators can help in the short term to pave the way forward for more reliable program implementation. Additionally, adequate funding is required to address these gaps and revisions needed within the OPHS regarding reproductive health including funding for local implementation as well as centralized supports for all public health units (as there is currently no capacity for this). OPHA would value leveraging our capacity for training and resource creation to support the public health sector with more centralized supports.

By recognizing reproductive health as critical to public and population health and including clear and specific recommendations regarding reproductive health in the Ontario Public Health Standards, we can strengthen reproductive and public health in Ontario.

We look forward to hearing back from you regarding this submission. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require additional information or would like to discuss these issues further. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and/or your colleagues to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,



John Atkinson
Executive Director
Ontario Public Health Association

Cc: Colleen Kiel, Director, Public Health Strategic Policy, Planning and Communications
Heather Schramm, Director, Health Promotion, Prevention Policy and Programs