

September 17th, 2007

Ontario Provincial Party Election Leaders,
John Tory, Conservative Party of Ontario
Frank De Jong, Green Party of Ontario (GPO)
Dalton McGuinty, Liberal Party of Ontario
Howard Hampton, New Democratic Party of Ontario

I am writing to you on behalf of the 32 non-governmental health organizations, professional groups and associations that make up the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance. We are a collaborative of leading health-related organizations working together to focus on chronic disease prevention and healthy living in a comprehensive manner.

Chronic disease affects us all, whether individually, through personal experience, or by knowing and caring for a family member, friend or neighbour affected by chronic disease. And it affects our health care system too: at least 60% of Ontario's health-care costs are due to chronic disease¹. While investing in better monitoring and treatment for those living with chronic conditions are important, it is essential that prevention of chronic disease is elevated and improved upon within Ontario's current health mandate. Not only will this work to reduce the burden of chronic disease in the future by providing supports and opportunities for Ontarians to be healthier and more active, it will also save health care dollars, at modest estimates, up to \$350 million dollars annually alone in hospital costs², and improve Ontarians' quality of life, particularly for those living with chronic disease, by providing secondary preventive measures.

Ontario needs a foundation upon which it can support the health of its citizens. This holds true in preventing chronic disease. A concerted effort including public education, social and physical environmental supports and public policy is required.

Today, both emphasis on and funding for prevention and health promotion in this province is inadequate; with only 1% of total health care costs put towards these areas, the system falls short of being adequately resourced and able to be effective. In turn, opportunities to support and address healthy eating and active living are minimal, poorly funded and lacking in coordination across the province, and more Ontarians' – and their health – are suffering. All of this, ultimately, increases health care spending, when the solution is clear; significant, upfront, investments in chronic disease prevention and wellness promotion would be more effective and save money in future.

¹ Ontario Health Quality Council. (2007). Q Monitor: *2007 Report on Ontario's Health System*.

² Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance. (March 2006). *Thinking Like A System: the way forward to prevent chronic disease in Ontario*.

In the short-term, the Alliance believes that immediate investment in the following nine actions by the party forming the Government of Ontario can have a major impact on the incidence of chronic disease in the Province.

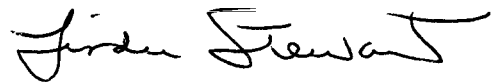
1. Require that healthy food/beverage choices be part of any contract between a food/beverage vendor and a publicly funded venue, e.g., schools, arenas, government offices, hospitals, etc.
2. Develop, enforce and evaluate province-wide policies and standards for healthy eating and physical activity in schools, including daycare institutions. This should include mandating schools, in partnership with local health units to use the School Health Environment Survey (SHES) as a planning, monitoring and evaluation tool to guide effective healthy eating and physical activity in their schools.
3. Build on the 30 minutes per day of physical activity now required in elementary-level public schools by developing daily physical activity standards and guidelines for all schools in all grades from K – 12 and implementing them over your first 2 terms in government.
4. Ensure access to nutritious food for all Ontarians by using the cost of the nutritious food basket (calculated annually by each Public Health Unit) in determining the rates for social assistance and the minimum wage. Long-term, Ontarians living in need require guaranteed income standards that can sufficiently support access and supply to nutritious, healthy foods.
5. Ensure adequate access to supplies and medication for persons with chronic diseases who are receiving social assistance or are living below the poverty line.
6. Control overall alcohol consumption and reduce high risk drinking, by linking the real price of alcoholic beverages to the Consumer Price Index and by encouraging more initiatives to expand access to brief interventions and counselling for high risk drinkers.
7. Provide financial incentives for workplaces to implement or continue with programs to encourage healthy practices among employees, i.e., providing and encouraging healthy food choices and physical activity (i.e. discounted memberships and flexible working hours) among staff.
8. Act on the recommendation of the Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity to increase investment to promote comprehensive healthy eating and physical activity strategies from \$10 to \$19 million and use the increased investment to implement health promotion strategies that are peer-reviewed as the world's best practices.
9. Continue with and expand targeted, strategic, well-resourced mass media campaigns (e.g., "It's not gonna kill you") to:
 - create a provincial environment that promotes healthy eating and active living
 - increase awareness of the health benefits of healthy eating and active living
 - promote healthy eating based on *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*

- promote regular physical activity based on *Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines to Healthy Active Living* for adults, older adults, children and youth
- promote energy balance for all Ontarians, especially children and youth
(adapted from the 2004 Chief Medical Officer of Health Annual Report.)

Ultimately, the development a chronic disease prevention system that is well funded, sustainable and fully integrated into government policies, programs and services should begin as soon as possible to ensure the on-going prevention of chronic disease in this province. It is essential for Ontarians today and tomorrow, and for the province's future.

Thank you for your consideration and interest in chronic disease prevention. The OCDPA 'Alliance' looks forward to meeting with you to further discussion the recommendations and policy directions contained within this letter. For further information on the OCDPA, its history and mandate please see our website at www.ocdpa.on.ca . Our staff can be contacted at 416-367-3313 ext 251. I can also be reached at the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, 502-425 University Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5G 1T6, or at linda@alphaweb.org.

Sincerely,



Linda Stewart,
Co-Chair, Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance

Attached. OCDPA brief

CC: Elizabeth Witmer, Conservative Party MOHLTC Critic
Hon. George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long Term Care
Hon. Jim Watson, Minister of Health Promotion
Shelley Martel, New Democratic Party Health Critic