

18 June 2009

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq
Minister of Health
House of Commons
Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Honourable Minister,

Re: Immediate support needed for the expansion of the Maternal-Infant Research on Environmental Chemicals (MIREC) Study

The **Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment (CPCHE)** and the **Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (OCDPA)** are concerned about the implications for lifelong health of early environmental exposures to toxic substances. The two partnerships represent 21 organizations that are active in Ontario and nationwide on issues of children's environmental health and chronic disease prevention. They have joined forces to promote awareness of, and appropriate policy responses to, the linkages between early (fetal and childhood) exposures to toxic chemicals and the development of chronic diseases, including asthma and other respiratory diseases, cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and impacts on the brain, including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.

The CPCHE and OCDPA partners are encouraged by the recent launch of the Maternal-Infant Research on Environmental Chemicals (MIREC) study and its focus on environmental exposures *in utero*, a developmental stage that is particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of toxic exposures. However, the study falls short of its potential by not following the children born to the participating mothers at least through early childhood to enable the assessment of health outcomes that may be associated with toxic exposures during fetal development and that may contribute to lifelong decrements in health.

We urge to you to fund, as a matter of high priority, the proposed MIREC-Child Development study. This incremental investment, which would enable researchers to follow the health and development of the children to the age of at least six years, would provide invaluable scientific information, while positioning Canada among the global leaders in research on children's environmental health and chronic disease prevention.

In addition to the risks they pose to the developing fetus and child, many of the metals and synthetic chemicals to be addressed through MIREC have known or suspected links to chronic disease. For example:

- **Lead** has been linked to impacts on the brain, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, chronic renal disease and cancer.

- **Mercury** has been linked to impacts on the brain, cardiovascular disease, and chronic renal disease.
- **Phthalates** have been linked to asthma and respiratory diseases. Further, both phthalates and **bisphenol A** are suspected of contributing to obesity, a strong risk factor for many chronic diseases.
- **Organochlorine pesticides** have been linked to a range of effects including diabetes, cancer, brain impacts and Parkinson's disease.
- **Organophosphate pesticides** have also been linked to many health impacts including cancer and brain impacts.
- **PCBs** are known to contribute to irreversible impacts on the developing brain and have been shown to increase the risks of diabetes, cancer, hypertension and Parkinson's disease.
- While **PBDEs** are not as well understood, research indicates similar impacts to PCBs.

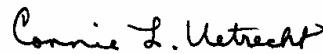
A crucially important aspect of the MIREC study is that it is one of very few efforts to address multiple chemical exposures. While progress is being made in Canada under the Chemicals Management Plan, the CMP largely remains an exercise of assessing individual chemicals in isolation from others. In reality, we are continuously and concurrently exposed to often low levels of numerous chemicals, through multiple exposure routes and with poorly understood consequences for health. Targeted and sustained research on the role of early and concurrent exposures to multiple toxic substances is critical to a coherent and *preventive* strategy for tackling chronic disease in Canada.

We look forward to a positive response to this request, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this and related issues of children's health protection and chronic disease prevention with you and/or members of your staff.

Yours sincerely,



Erica W. Phipps
Partnership Director, CPCHE



Connie Uetrecht
Co-Chair, OCDPA

Encl.

Participating CPCHE* and OCDPA† Organizations:

Alzheimer Society of Ontario [†]	Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario [†]
Association of Local Public Health Agencies [†]	Learning Disabilities Association of Canada*
Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment*	Ontario College of Family Physicians*
Canadian Cancer Society (Ontario Division) [†]	Ontario Lung Association [†]
Canadian Child Care Federation*	Ontario Physical and Health Education Association [†]
Canadian Diabetes Association [†]	Ontario Public Health Association* [†]
Canadian Environmental Law Association*	Osteoporosis Canada [†]
Environmental Health Clinic – Women's College Hospital*	Pollution Probe*
Environmental Health Institute of Canada*	South Riverdale Community Health Centre*
Health Nexus [†]	Toronto Public Health*