

26/01/05

Hon. George Smitherman
Minister of Health and Long-Term
Care
Hepburn Block
10th Floor, 80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto ON M7A 2C4

Hon. Gerard Kennedy
Minister of Education
Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2

Hon. Christopher Bentley
Minister of Labour
14th Flr
400 University Ave
Toronto, ON M7A 1T7

Hon. Carolyn Bennett, P.C., M.P.
Minister of State (Public Health)
Brooke Claxton Building
Tunney's Pasture
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh, M.P.
Minister's Office - Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Bldg., Tunney's
Pasture
P.L. 0906C
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K9

Honourable Ministers,

Re. Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives

On behalf of member Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health and Affiliate organizations of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa), I am writing to encourage swift action on the recommendations of the 2004 Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives*.

In this report, overweight due to poor nutrition and lack of physical activity is identified as one of the greatest health challenges and risk factors for chronic disease in the new century, one that may soon overtake tobacco as the leading cause of preventable death and disease. Like those related to tobacco, they will exert avoidable demands on health care resources as they are increasingly devoted to their treatment.

Over the last half-century, reduction in the use of tobacco products and exposure to their hazards has been the result of a combination of education, regulation, and denormalization. The same combination of approaches can be used to address obesity, in a strategy where individual approaches are supported by policies and public education campaigns aimed at improving population health through diet and exercise. Success depends on actions from all levels of government that are consistent and complementary.

The *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives* report contains recommendations aimed at the provincial and federal governments, as well as the food industry, school boards and workplaces. Their intent is to foster supportive environments that facilitate increased physical activity and healthier food choices for individuals, thus reducing the prevalence of overweight and obesity, and thus the incidence of heart disease, diabetes and other illnesses that kill tens of thousands of Canadians every year and disable countless others.

Small steps in this regard have already been taken, with the removal of unhealthy foods from Ontario's elementary schools, Ontario's Active 2010 initiative, Health Canada's proposed revisions to the *Nutrition Recommendations for Canadians* and this year's implementation of mandatory nutritional labeling of

food products. Some food manufacturers have also begun voluntary elimination of trans-fats from their products as evidence of their danger increases. These steps must be incorporated into a more comprehensive, multi-sectoral strategy to prevent negative health impacts due to poor nutrition and physical inactivity.

This important exercise in health promotion and disease prevention will decrease the risks from diabetes, coronary heart disease, certain types of cancer and other diseases. As with any measure aimed at preventing disease, the obvious long-term benefits of a healthier population include reduced pressures on the health care system, increased economic productivity and an increase in disability-free years of life.

alPHA's members strongly support the recommendations contained in *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives*, and strongly urge that a strategy to address the high prevalence of overweight and obesity be made a top policy priority. We encourage each of you to use these recommendations to inform policies and educational campaigns that will foster healthier eating habits and opportunities for physical activity for all Canadians. We look forward to assisting in this strategy and welcome a response at your earliest convenience.

Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives may be downloaded from the URL below.

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/ministry_reports/cmoh04_report/healthy_weights_112404.pdf

Also enclosed for your information is a the news release summarizing the report, alPHA's correspondence with the Chief Medical Officer of Health following the release of the report, and alPHA's resolution on Childhood Obesity.

Sincerely,

Larry O'Connor
President

Copy: Dr. Sheela Basrur, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Hon. Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario
Chairs, Ontario Boards of Health
Kimberly Green, President, Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health
Jill Faulkner, President Health Promotion Ontario

Encl.

As the provincial organization representing public health, alPHA provides leadership and expertise on public health management issues. It speaks and advocates on behalf of boards of health and public health units to government and other health-related organizations. Members include medical officers of health, board of health members and senior managers in public health disciplines including inspection, epidemiology, nursing, dentistry, nutrition, health promotion and business administration

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Ontario obesity reaches epidemic proportions

Chief Medical Officer Of Health Recommends Action

TORONTO, Nov. 24 /CNW/ - Healthy, active living combined with sensible eating habits improves quality of life for everyone and reduces the risk of preventable diseases, Dr. Sheela Basrur, the province's Chief Medical Officer of Health, said today as she released a report entitled Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives.

"I am alarmed to report that almost one out of every two adults in Ontario is overweight or obese," Dr. Basrur said. "Fortunately, this epidemic can be reversed. Through this report, I want people to understand how they can find the right balance in their lives, and how we can create the best environments - at work, school and in our communities - to promote physical activity and healthy eating."

In her report, Dr. Basrur states that:

- Obesity among children ages seven to 13 tripled between 1981 and 1996
- Unhealthy weights are responsible for a dramatic rise in type 2 diabetes and contributes to heart disease, strokes, hypertension and some cancers
- Obesity costs Canada's economy \$2.7 billion and the health care system \$1.6 billion in 2000/01.

Dr. Basrur's report outlines many factors - including individual, social, cultural, economic and environmental conditions - that have caused the obesity epidemic. The report makes recommendations to promote healthy weights, calling on all levels of government, the health sector, food industry, workplaces, schools, families and individuals to become part of a comprehensive, province-wide effort to eat better and exercise more.

"We know that healthy weights mean healthy lives," Dr. Basrur said. "People who are a healthy weight feel better, are less likely to develop diseases, and enjoy a higher quality of life. By acting now, we can reduce the risks associated with unhealthy weights, and reap the benefits for decades to come."

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca>

Version française disponible

Backgrounder

HEALTHY WEIGHTS, HEALTHY LIVES REPORT

In her annual report, Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives, Dr. Sheela Basrur, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, is recommending a comprehensive strategy to help Ontarians achieve and maintain healthy weights and enjoy healthy lives. These recommendations are aimed at many different sectors of society.

Recommendations for the Ontario government include:

- Developing an innovative and comprehensive plan to address healthy weights, led by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and also involving the Ministries of Tourism and Recreation, Agriculture and Food, Children and Youth Services, Education, Transportation, Community and Social Services, Environment, Municipal Affairs and

Housing, Consumer and Business Services, and other non-governmental organizations

- Developing a targeted, well-resourced mass media campaign to increase awareness of the benefits of healthy weights
- Introducing policies and programs that promote healthy eating, including controlling food advertising targeted at children (similar to what's in place in Quebec where advertising of some products to children under 13 is prohibited)
- Developing policies that promote physical activity, including encouraging safe transportation options such as more bicycle lanes and sidewalks
- Joining with the private sector to highlight successful initiatives to promote healthy eating and regular physical activity
- Giving Ontarians better access to information and counselling by providing a telephone information/advice service (Dial-a-Dietitian) based on a British Columbia model that has been in operation for 30 years.

Recommendations for Health Canada include:

- Investing resources in a long-term, multi-level strategy to promote healthy weights, healthy eating and physical activity based on the World Health Organization strategy and work with provincial and territorial partners to implement a healthy living strategy across the country
- Funding public health research that will encourage practitioners and academics to investigate effective ways to improve eating habits, physical activity and healthy weights
- Phasing out trans fat from processed foods and requiring large chain restaurants to disclose basic nutrition facts about the foods they serve
- Funding a national fruit and vegetable promotional campaign
- Funding a national physical activity promotion agency.

Recommendations for local and regional governments include:

- Providing more opportunities for people to be physically active by enhancing park land and recreational areas
- Ensuring young children in day care settings have healthy food choices, daily physical activity, and are taught about the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity
- Integrating healthy eating and physical activity opportunities in new and existing community programs such as prenatal classes, Early Years Centres and after school programs.

Recommendations for the food industry include:

- Phasing out the use of trans fats in processed foods
- Decreasing serving sizes, especially of snack foods
- Developing healthier prepared foods as options for busy families
- Increasing user-friendly food labelling on large chain restaurant menus and take-out/deli foods.

Recommendations for workplaces include:

- Developing a corporate culture that supports healthy eating, physical activity and employee wellness
- Implementing ways to be more physically active at work, such as having exercise breaks
- Promoting healthy eating at work through vending machines and cafeterias that offer healthy choices.

Recommendations for schools and school boards include:

- Developing guidelines for food available in school cafeterias and

vending machines

- Providing daily physical education that is taught by teachers trained in physical education
- Encouraging parents to support healthy eating and physical activity at home
- Promoting physical activity when building or retrofitting schools by having bicycle racks, active and safe routes to school, and adequate indoor facilities for physical activity.

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For further information: Members of the media: Dan Strasbourg, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, (416) 314-6197; Members of the general public: (416) 327-4327, or (800) 268-1154

December 7, 2004

Dr. Sheela Basrur
Chief Medical Officer of Health and
Assistant Deputy Minister
Public Health Division
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Hepburn Block, 11th Floor
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto ON M7A 1R3

Dear Dr. Basrur,

Re: 2004 Chief Medical Officer of Health Annual Report

On behalf of the member Boards of Health, Medical Officers of Health and Affiliate organizations of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, I am writing to express our support of your recently released 2004 Annual Report, *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives*.

The rising prevalence of obesity in Ontarians has been a growing concern for those of us in the public health field and broader health sector. As you may recall, we wrote earlier that alPHa members endorsed a resolution that called on the CMOH to review and make recommendations on childhood obesity in the next report and to develop a province-wide obesity strategy.

So it is with great pleasure that we receive your 2004 Annual Report. We applaud the comprehensive, multi-sectoral recommendations you have made on reducing obesity and praise the government for making the issue a top priority. Indeed, the report builds on Minister Smitherman's identification of childhood obesity as a key issue when he spoke at our annual conference this past June.

Through collaborative community efforts, the strategies you have outlined will have a far-reaching impact for future generations. The alPHa membership will continue to promote healthy eating and physical activity in communities across the province, and welcomes further opportunities to work with the Ministry to achieve healthier weights and lives for all Ontarians.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED

Larry O'Connor
President

cc. Hon. George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

2004 alPHa RESOLUTION NO. A04-6

TITLE: **Childhood Obesity**

SPONSOR: Regional Municipality of Durham

WHEREAS a childhood obesity epidemic exists in Ontario; and

WHEREAS childhood obesity commonly leads to adult obesity; and

WHEREAS obesity is a risk factor for chronic diseases such as colorectal cancer, diabetes and ischemic heart disease; and

WHEREAS the adverse health effects and related costs of obesity are of great public health significance in Ontario; and

WHEREAS the Chief Medical Officer of Health publishes an annual report to highlight and make recommendations with respect to a health topic of great public health significance;

WHEREAS the Government of Ontario has struck expert panels in the past to study and develop strategies to address significant public health matters such as tobacco use and infectious diseases;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) urges the Chief Medical Officer of Health to review and make recommendations on childhood obesity in the next annual report;

AND FURTHER that alPHa urges the Government of Ontario to strike an expert panel to study childhood obesity and to recommend an Ontario obesity strategy.

Action from Conference: **Moved:** **R. Kyle (Durham Region)**
 Seconded: **I. Parkes (Northwestern)**

Carried