

Minister of State
(Public Health)



Ministre d'État
(Santé publique)

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0K9

JUL 19 2004

Mr. Andrew Papadopoulos
Association of Local Public Health Agencies
502-425 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1T6

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Dear Mr. Papadopoulos:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for attending the public health roundtable held in your area recently and for your valuable input into this initial phase of consultations. As of May, we held 36 roundtables with stakeholders across the country to find out what you believe are the key public health issues that should be considered in establishing a new agency and pan-Canadian public health network- the response in all areas has been tremendous!

Your input has been instrumental in establishing the new Agency so I thought I would bring you up to date on our progress thus far and, as a result, share with you some of the key messages we've heard during our travels.

On May 17 in Winnipeg, I was proud to unveil the details of our strategy to strengthen the public health system in Canada. The new Public Health Agency of Canada will have two main pillars, in Winnipeg and Ottawa, and will work with a network of specialized centres across the country. This integrated national approach will help improve the health of Canadians by dealing with epidemics of chronic disease, fostering health promotion and education and ensuring we are ready in the event that another serious infectious disease hits our shores.

The Agency's Winnipeg pillar, home of Canada's only Level 4 microbiology lab for human health, will be coordinating the Agency's infectious disease functions, including epidemiology, and will have a critical function, nationally and internationally, in the event of an infectious disease outbreak.

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The Agency's Ottawa offices will be responsible for working closely with other departments, including Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, on emergency planning, preparedness and response to national public health emergencies. Ottawa will also coordinate efforts to reduce chronic diseases and injuries.

With the vision of developing a strong national public health system, I also announced on May 17th the creation of six National Collaborating Centres to enhance Canada's response to infectious and chronic diseases and to ensure an overall integrated and proactive approach to public health. The Government of Canada is making an initial investment of \$15 million dollars over two years to establish the six National Collaborating Centres.

These centres will be established in various parts of the country, each having a very specific public health focus:

- Atlantic Canada - Determinants of Health: to study how social factors affect health
- Quebec - Public Policy and Risk Assessment: to study the impact of public policy on Canadians' health and well-being Ontario - Infrastructure, Info-Structure and New Tools Development: to study how public health information can best be gathered and utilized to minimize health risks
- Prairies - Infectious Diseases: to study the present and future risks of emerging and re-emerging diseases
- British Columbia - Environmental Health: to study the effects of the environment on human health

Given the significant and persistent health disparities that exist for Canada's Aboriginal Peoples, a National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health is being established to study the health factors affecting the health status of Aboriginal Canadians in urban, rural and remote communities. Partners in the establishment of this centre will include the British Columbia government; Aboriginal organizations and communities; academic institutions; and other provinces and territories.

These collaborating centres will act as catalysts, fostering linkages among governments, researchers, the public health community and other stakeholders to build on existing strengths across the country.

The search for the country's first Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) was also launched on May 17th, and a search committee was named to oversee the process. In the interim Dr. Frank Plummer has been appointed the Acting CPHO. The CPHO will be primarily located in Winnipeg, with offices in Ottawa, and will have responsibilities for the three key functions of the Agency: infectious diseases, emergency preparedness and chronic diseases.

These announcements build on the Government of Canada's Budget 2004 commitment to strengthen the country's public health system. The Budget contributed a \$665 million initial investment to this effort, including \$100 million for increased front-line public health capacity, \$300 million to support new vaccine programs and \$100 million for improved surveillance systems. It also provided \$165 million in new funding for other federal activities in public health, such as strengthening preparedness against infectious diseases, creating emergency response teams, replenishing the national emergency stockpile system, and investing in federal laboratories and surveillance systems, bursaries, scholarships, fellowships, and First Nations and Inuit Health.

The establishment of a Public Health Agency, the appointment of a CPHO and creation of the National Collaborating Centres are initiatives built on an overwhelming consensus within the public health community.

The message has been clear from coast to coast- this Agency and a public health strategy must first and foremost be built on the premise of a strong common purpose blended with respect for local/community wisdom and knowledge. This will allow us to strengthen the already existing expertise across the country with the goal of developing a world class pan-Canadian public health network.

We believe that the establishment of this Agency will result in new opportunities for building the federal government's regional contributions and capacity in public health. The Agency will work

collaboratively with provincial and territorial governments to provide experts and practitioners across the country with the tools they need to get the job done at the local level. The pan-Canadian Public Health Network will function as a comprehensive mechanism for intergovernmental collaboration, coordination, oversight, and joint policy development on public health issues. In terms of Canada's relationship to the world, the Agency will ensure seamless coordination of Canadian efforts within the global public health community, and with our various partners such as the World Health Organization, and the Centre for Disease Control in the United States.

All of those involved in this great endeavour are committed to ensuring that Canada's public health strategy will significantly improve our preparedness for public health emergencies while strengthening the overall national public health capacity and ultimately the health status of Canadians. As we move forward towards our shared goals, I remain committed to providing every opportunity to engage all Parliamentarians, my Provincial and Territorial counterparts, stakeholders and the Canadian Public. I would encourage you to visit the Public Health website at www.hc-sc.gc.ca to help us with our ongoing work. I look forward to your continued support and input.

Sincerely,

Keep up the great work!



Carolyn Bennett, P.C., M.P., M.D.