

NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) congratulates Ontario government for provision of three new childhood vaccines

TORONTO --The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) is very pleased with the Ontario government's budget announcement of funding for immunizations against chickenpox, meningitis and pneumococcal infections for all of Ontario's children.

Vaccinations are often cited as among the greatest achievements in public health, being safe and cost-effective measures of preventing death and disease from a myriad of infections. Thanks to early visits to the doctor's office, the vast majority of Ontario's children are immune to measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough). Many more take advantage of annual flu shots.

Now, after years of recommendations, protection from meningitis, chickenpox and pneumococcal infections (which cause a range of diseases, including pneumonia, ear infections and a form of meningitis) will now be offered to Ontario's children as well.

"In the absence of this public funding, a family paid up to \$800 per child for the complete slate of shots to protect them against these diseases. The risk of infection, illness and death was therefore higher for children of families for whom this amount was prohibitive. This amounts to health protection based on ability to pay, a notion that most Canadians find unacceptable," said Executive Director Andy Papadopoulos.

alPHa has been strong and clear in its advocacy for the inclusion of these new vaccines in the universal schedule of publicly funded immunizations. Considering that generally more expensive treatments of vaccine-preventable diseases are covered by public funding, logic demands similar coverage for their prevention.

As virtually every other Canadian jurisdiction moved forward with programs to fund all or some of these vaccines, Ontario fell farther behind, ahead of only Manitoba and the Yukon in its commitment to assuming some financial responsibility for them. Following this week's announcement, Ontario joins Alberta as Canada's leader in that regard.

This is a significant step forward for public health in Ontario, another signal that the government holds health protection and disease prevention as top priorities in Ontario. alPHa looks forward to continuing its collaboration with the Ontario government to help it realize its goal of making Ontario the healthiest province in Canada.

As the provincial organization representing public health, alPHa provides leadership and expertise on public health management issues. Its 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.

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