

Hon. George Smitherman
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Main Legislative Building
Room 447
Toronto, ON M7A 1A4

21/07/04

Honourable Minister,

RE: Resolutions from alPHa Annual Conference, 2004

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 introduce the resolutions endorsed this past June by our membership for consideration, information and anticipated action by your Ministry. We would like to call your attention to alPHa Resolutions **A04-2, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9** for action, and to **A04-3** for information. A copy of each is included for your convenience.

- No. A04-2 Ontario Expert Panel on SARS and Infectious Diseases**
No. A04-3 National Advisory Committee on SARS and Public Health (*for information*)

Recent public health crises, chief among them the Walkerton *E. coli* outbreak and that of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), have prompted several detailed analyses of Ontario's public health system. These analyses revealed significant deterioration and gaps throughout, including underfunding, political interference, human resource shortages and inefficiencies in communication. These and other deficiencies have been itemized in great detail in the Report of the Walkerton Inquiry, and the reports of the Ontario Expert Panel on SARS and Infectious Diseases (Walker), the National Advisory Committee on SARS and Public Health (Naylor), and the SARS Commission Interim Report (Campbell). Each of these makes critical recommendations that must be implemented as quickly and as practically as possible in order to restore Ontario's essential health promotion and protection functions. Their implementation must be carried out with the co-operation of all levels of government and full and open consultation with public health service providers.

- No. A04-4 Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines (MHPSG)**
No. A04-5 Continual Revision of General and Program Standards

As the guidelines that form the foundation of how local public health agencies provide the essential services of health protection and promotion, disease prevention and surveillance, it is essential that they reflect and are informed by current best practices and evidence. Much has happened in public health in the seven years since they were last revised. Revisions completed over two years ago by technical review committees to five of these programs remain tabled. In addition to including these in an update of the MHPSG, alPHa's members believe that a process must be implemented for their continual revision. While compliance with these standards is an important indicator of efficient public health service delivery, its effectiveness can only be ensured if standards themselves are appropriate for the best possible health outcomes.

- No. A04-6 Childhood Obesity**

Childhood obesity has been identified as an emerging epidemic in Ontario, one that is a strong precursor to poor health outcomes later in life, including diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancers. As the hallmark of public health is prevention, alPHa is urging the Government of Ontario and the Chief Medical Officer of Health to make this issue a top priority, by studying the issue and formulating an obesity strategy for the province.

No. A04-8 Preschool Speech, Language and Audiology Funding

The Child Health Mandatory Program itemizes several important factors in the healthy development of children. Among them are developmental milestones, including speech, language and hearing. Communication and learning are essential to a child's integration into his or her social environment, an important prerequisite for health. It is essential that the standard of delivery for these required services (as with any of the mandatory programs) is equal throughout Ontario. Many children in rural areas and in First Nations communities (which are losing federal support for accessing provincial services) who would benefit most from these services cannot access them due to access and delivery challenges inherent in the vast expanses of northern Ontario. alPHa is urging a funding increase that accounts for these challenges

No. A04-9 Public Health Impact Statement Requirements

The goals and objectives as currently set out within the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines address important public health issues and are valuable measures of progress relating to the health of Ontario citizens. Set by the Ministry of Health, the standards contained therein apply only to the business of Boards of Health. It has become increasingly clear that the achievement of these goals and objectives (both existing and proposed) can only be reached by broader coordination and application across administrative jurisdictions. We are thus urging the government to consider the implementation of a process that will set comprehensive health goals and objectives for the entire province, with complementary standards for all ministries and government-funded agencies (Please refer to alPHa resolution **A03-1**, attached). These standards should include a requirement that public health impact statements be included in all Cabinet submissions.

Thank you for your attention to these important issues. We look forward to a reply at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Susan Lee
Interim Executive Director

Copy: Dr. Sheela Basrur, Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Medical Officer of Health
Hon. Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario (Resolution A04-9)
Hon. Paul Martin, Prime Minister of Canada (Resolution A04-3)
Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh, MP, Minister of Health (Resolution A04-3)
Hon Carolyn Bennett, MP, Minister of State, Public Health (Resolution A04-3)

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