

09/12/04

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

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni,
Minister, Children and Youth Services
14th Flr
56 Wellesley St W
Toronto, ON M5S 2S3

Honourable Ministers,

Re. Ontario Medical Association (OMA) position on protecting children from second hand smoke

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 with our endorsement the OMA's position paper, *Exposure to second-hand smoke: are we protecting our kids?*

Tobacco is the number one cause of preventable death and disease, killing approximately 16 000 Ontarians per year. Cancer Care Ontario has further estimated that almost 3000 of these deaths are a result of exposure to second hand smoke (SHS). There is no longer any credible argument against the ill health effects of SHS.

While most Ontarians are now protected from exposure to SSH in public places and work places, homes and vehicles remain significant sources of SHS for children. Statistics Canada recently reported that nearly 1 in 5 children 12 years-of-age are exposed to SHS in cars and 1 in 4 are exposed in homes.

The reported health impacts of SSH on Children include respiratory health, low birth weight, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), risks for the development of cancer and heart disease in adult life and behavioral impacts such as attention-span and ability to reason and understand. With 20 to 25% of our children at risk of these impacts due to exposure to SSH in homes and cars, action must clearly be taken.

The goal of Ontario's Chronic Disease Prevention Mandatory Health Program is to reduce morbidity and mortality from preventable chronic diseases. This includes the objective of increasing the proportion of smoke free homes and a requirement to provide information to parents, caregivers and the community on the risks of second-hand smoke and strategies for attaining smoke-free homes, home day cares, and cars.

We therefore join the OMA in its call for the government of Ontario to take a more active role in developing strategies to protect children from SHS, including new legislation as recommended in the OMA report. The government of Ontario has pledged admirable steps to protect its residents from the dangers of SSH in public places and workplaces. We now call on you to take similar steps to protect our children from exposure to the same dangers in homes and cars. alPHa fully endorses the OMA's call and looks forward to assisting you in acting on its recommendations.

Sincerely,

Larry O'Connor,
President

Copy: Dr. John Rapin, President, OMA
Dr. Ted Boadway, Executive Director, Health Policy, OMA

