

2005 alPHa Resolution A05-4

TITLE **Determinants of Health as a Mandatory Public Health Program**

SPONSOR: Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health

WHEREAS Canada's Minister of State for Public Health has declared that "poor living conditions such as poverty, food insecurity, family violence, inadequate housing, unsafe environmental conditions, social discrimination, poor working conditions and lack of education... are often the root causes of poor health" and that "finding strategies to improve these social determinants is equally, and in some cases, more important to health status than medical care and improving personal health behaviours." ¹ ; and

WHEREAS 1,065,000 children (nearly one in six), lives in poverty², 18% live in deep poverty, and 14,000 people are homeless in Canada³; and

WHEREAS there are strong associations of health inequities with identifiable subpopulations (e.g. Aboriginal people, immigrants, the physically / mentally disabled) putting them at greater risk of illness and preventable death⁴; and

WHEREAS the Health Council of Canada (HCC) has concluded that increases in health care spending without targeting the socio-economic needs of people at greatest risk will not reduce health disparities and advised that the First Ministers' work on reducing health disparities should be given high priority⁵; and

WHEREAS the HCC has made the following three recommendations:

- Health promotion strategies should be broadened beyond lifestyle issues to focus on health disparities through a broad intersectoral approach;
- Since health disparities are the "number one health problem in the country", the gap between groups in Canada must be reported and highlighted;
- Targets for the reduction of health disparities must be set; and

WHEREAS the HCC has called for "strong language" in order to increase public awareness of the critical role of socio-economic disparities in health outcomes and health care system utilization; and

WHEREAS in Ontario, public health units are well situated within communities and the health sector to speak to and act on these determinants of health; and

WHEREAS the appointment of a new Minister for Health Promotion in Ontario and a planned major review of public health's Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health create opportunities to address the determinants of health as a population-based health promotion intervention;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) request that the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines be revised to include the Determinants of Health as a recognized health program and service area and planning framework for all Ontario boards of health;

¹ "Minister of State for Public Health Helps Launch Important New WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health, in Santiago, Chile" *Public Health Agency of Canada News Release* 18 Mar 2005. 19 Aug. 2005
http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/media/nr-rp/2005/2005_6_e.html

² Campaign 2000, *One Million Too Many - Implementing Solutions to Child Poverty in Canada - 2004 Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada* 24 Nov 2004. 19 Aug 2005 <http://www.campaign2000.ca/rc/rc04/04NationalReportCard.pdf>

³ Beiser M and Stewart M. Reducing Health Disparities: A priority for Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 2005; 96(2): S4-5.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Health Council of Canada, *Health Care Renewal in Canada: Accelerating Change*, p. 8. Jan 2005. 19 Aug 2005
http://hcc-ccs.com/report/Annual_Report/Accelerating_Change_HCC_2005.pdf

AND FURTHER THAT alPHa request Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health to appoint an expert committee with intersectoral membership and strong public health representation to develop evidence-based goals, objectives, requirements, standards and evaluation framework, as well as a timely implementation strategy for this new Mandatory Program;

AND FURTHER THAT alPHa requests that the determinants of health be incorporated into the scope and function of the new Health Protection and Promotion Agency;

AND FURTHER THAT the alPHa Board encourage all Ontario boards of health to incorporate a broad determinants of health approach into organizational mission statements and strategic plans;

AND FURTHER THAT alPHa facilitates the identification of opportunities for advocacy on broad determinants of health and work with its members to enhance their role as effective change agents to address health disparities and improve health outcomes, recognizing the roles and responsibilities of other agencies, ministries and governments".