



DISCUSSION ON THE 2007 ONTARIO BUDGET

Presentation to

The Honourable Greg Sorbara

Minister of Finance

December 11, 2006

Presented by

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**Presentation to the Minister of Finance
Re. 2007/2008 Budget**

1. Good morning. My name is Liana Nolan and I am President of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, also known as alPHa. I am very pleased to have this opportunity to address you today.
2. First, on behalf of alPHa's members - Ontario's Medical Officers of Health, Board of Health Trustees and senior managers in public health units - I would like to express our appreciation for the commitment to health promotion, health protection, and disease prevention that has been shown by Minister Smitherman, Minister Watson, and this government. Public funding of additional vaccines, new legislation protecting people from second hand smoke, and an ambitious plan to renew the public health system are important steps to a healthy Ontario.
3. As I listen to the presentations of others here today, I cannot help but appreciate the monumental task that lies before you and your staff, Minister Sorbara, as well as the difficult decisions about funding that you must make.
4. From a population health perspective, many areas of government spending support the determinants of health and contribute to the overall health and well-being of the citizens of Ontario. Tax dollars spent on education, employment, the environment, culture, agriculture and food, children and youth, social services, seniors, aboriginals, northern development, to name a few, all contribute in a positive way to a healthy population.
5. Like you, those who work in public health care deeply about ensuring that the people in Ontario communities have the resources they need to be successful. The themes of the last 2 budgets have reflected a strong desire to build a healthy Ontario in every sense of the word. The 2005 budget focused on education, health care, and economic concerns. The 2006 budget focused on giving each Ontarian the opportunity to build success. I want to encourage you to maintain this broad focus on a healthy population.
6. The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care has, by far, the largest budget of any ministry, accounting for almost half of all government spending. Since the election of this government in 2003, there have

been two new ministries formed that represent a long-term commitment to healthy populations and to eventual reductions in the demand on Ontario's illness care system.

7. The first is the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal in October of 2003. That Ministry's leader, the Honourable David Caplan introduced the Places to Grow Act on October 28, 2004, which, whether he intended it or not, is an Act that promotes health.
8. The first plan created under this Act is the one for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, released in June 2006. This plan recognizes the strong role that infrastructure and what is known as "the built environment" plays in the health of all citizens. The plan recognized current concerns about obesity and talks about building a community that supports active living.
9. The plan also talks about providing more options for living, working, and playing; reducing dependency on cars; increasing air quality; and increasing use of public transit. These are exactly the kinds of goals that result in healthier people and lower incidence of chronic disease when they are applied to community planning.
10. I want to congratulate your government for recognizing the importance of the built environment to the overall health of the population. In public health, we look forward to more of this kind of planning in Ontario.
11. I also have to mention the new Ministry of Health Promotion, created in June 2005. Minister Watson's plan, for Healthy Eating and Active Living demonstrates further commitment to disease prevention and health promotion. This is truly a breath of fresh air after decades of emphasis on a health care system to treat the sick and injured.
12. I want to encourage you to facilitate an expanded mandate for the Ministry of Health Promotion through increased funding to this important Ministry. Minister Watson has a solid understanding of what his ministry can achieve with enough resources, and the Healthy Eating Active Living plan is just a start.
13. The health units across Ontario also have some specific concerns that we would ask you to consider when setting the next budget.
14. Fiscal 2007-08 is the final year of Operation Health Protection. This action plan to prevent threats to our health and to promote a healthy

Ontario was put in place in response to the serious public health emergencies experienced in this province. I am of course referring to Walkerton and SARS.

15. As a result of that plan, we expect to see a new provincial public health agency in 2007-08. A number of important provincial and regional resources have been established.
16. At the local public health unit level, a review of local public health capacity has been completed and a review of the Mandatory programs for public health is underway.
17. We urge you to ensure that there is funding to implement the new public health policy directions in 2007-08 that will result from the recommendations of public health Capacity Review Committee and the completion of the mandatory program review.
18. The intent of Operation Health Protection was to enhance the public health system and it has in a number of important ways. The public health units, on the front lines, however, continue to need support for the important health protection and promotion services they provide.
19. Health promotion, disease prevention and early detection are the foundations of a healthy population -- foundations that are the responsibility of Ontario's public health system to build and strengthen. Significant and guaranteed investments in the public health system must be a government key priority if the commitments to improving health care, reducing wait times and making Ontarians the healthiest Canadians are genuine.
20. Lastly, I would like to address the question, "What should the government's top priority be for this year's budget and how should it be funded?"
21. I would like to encourage the 2007-08 budget to have a focus on the most vulnerable among us, and particularly those living in poverty. Specifically, I would urge you to:
 - implement a non-refundable tax credit to be paid to poor families with children,
 - review the minimum wage from a health perspective and establish a living wage that ensures housing and food security for all Ontario workers, and

- ensure that the basic allowance portion of Ontario Works financial assistance allows for adequate housing and nutrition.

- 22. By reducing the impact of poverty on the individuals and families struggling in what can only be called dire circumstances, you will ultimately lower overall costs to the health and social service systems and put badly needed resources in the hands of those who need it the most.

- 23. In closing, I would like to offer my sincere appreciation for the difficulties inherent in the task of allocating scarce resources. Finally, alPHa is confident that the Minister of Health and Long-term Care, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the staff of the Public Health Branch and our members – medical officers of health, board of health trustees and affiliate organizations – will continue to work together to ensure that Ontario’s public health system is second to none.

Thank you.