

August 19, 2009

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq,
Minister, Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building,
Tunney's Pasture
Postal Locator: 0906C
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

Dr. David Butler Jones
Chief Public Health Officer
Public Health Agency of Canada
1015 Arlington Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 3R2

Hon. David Caplan
Minister of Health and Long-
Term Care
10th Flr, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor St
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Dear Minister Aglukkaq, Minister Caplan, and Dr. Butler-Jones

Re. alPHa Resolution A09-8, 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak in Ontario

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 alPHa's Resolution on the 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak in Ontario, passed at our 2009 Annual General Meeting.

As noted in the attached resolution, 56 confirmed cases and 21 deaths across seven provinces were directly attributed to the outbreak, which was traced back to products from an Ontario meat processing plant. The detection and management of the outbreak was subject to a variety of challenges, including uncoordinated jurisdictional responses, different triggers for action by various agencies, inherent difficulties in confirming listeria infections, and unclear communications.

These challenges are itemized and described in detail in the April 2009 *Chief Medical Officer of Health's Report on the Management of the 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak in Ontario*, along with recommendations to enhance the capacity to meet them in the future. These fall under four key areas of focus:

- Clarification of Roles and Responsibilities in Outbreak Management
- Strengthening Laboratory Capacity
- Enhancing Ontario's Capacity to Detect Foodborne Outbreaks
- Improving Communications

Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada estimate that every year between 11 and 13 million Canadians suffer from illnesses related to the consumption of contaminated food. Outbreak investigations such as this one often reveal required enhancements to food handling practices, regulation, oversight and communication. The failure to act on such information is a guarantee that this estimate will remain unnecessarily high. We are therefore urging immediate and full implementation of the recommendations of the April 2009 report, which can be viewed in full here:

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/disease/listeria/listeriosis_outbreak_rep.pdf

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED

Linda Stewart,
Executive Director

Copy: Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada
Hon. Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario
Hon. Dwight Duncan, Minister of Finance (Ontario)
Dr. Vivek Goel, President and CEO, Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion
Dr. Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer of Health (Ontario)

Encl.

alPHa RESOLUTION A09-8

TITLE: 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak in Ontario

SPONSOR: Durham Region Health Department

WHEREAS The 2008 listeriosis outbreak affected 7 provinces and resulted in 56 confirmed cases being reported and 21 persons having died; and

WHEREAS Ontario was the hardest hit province such that 41 of the cases and 16 deaths occurred in this province; and

WHEREAS Ontario's Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) struck a Provincial Listeriosis Review Committee to provide him with advice on improving the public health response to foodborne outbreaks; and

WHEREAS The CMOH released a Report on the Management of the 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak in Ontario with recommendations in the following areas: Clarify roles and responsibilities in outbreak management; strengthen laboratory capacity; enhance Ontario's capacity to detect foodborne outbreaks and improve communication; and

WHEREAS It is important that these recommendations be fully implemented in order for Ontario's public health system to effectively identify and respond to any future cross-jurisdictional foodborne or other outbreaks;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that alPHa urges the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, Health Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and the Public Health Agency of Canada to act immediately to implement the recommendations of the CMOH's Report on the Management of the 2008 Listeriosis Outbreak in Ontario; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that alPHa urges the Government of Ontario and Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health to ensure that boards of health receive sufficient provincial funding to ensure that local public health agencies have the capacity to investigate and report foodborne and other outbreaks in as complete and timely a fashion as possible; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that alPHa urges the Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health to track the implementation of his recommendations and publicly report on the status of implementation at least annually until they are fully implemented; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Prime Minister of Canada, Minister of Health Canada, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, Premier of Ontario, Ministers of Finance and Health and Long-Term Care, Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health, and the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion are so advised.

ACTION FROM CONFERENCE:

Moved: K. Gorman (Durham)

Seconded: B. Hughes (Timiskaming)

Resolution CARRIED