

Professor Sir Michael Marmot
Chairman, Commission on Social Determinants of Health
c/o UCL International Institute for Society and Health
University College London
Gower Street
London WC1E 7HB

Re. alPHA Resolution A09-5, World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health (WHO-CSDH): Call to Action for Ontario Public Health

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 congratulate you on the release of *Closing the Gap in a Generation*, the final report of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health, and to share alPHA's Resolution on the subject, passed at our 2009 Annual General Meeting.

In the Province of Ontario, health promotion and protection, disease prevention and public health surveillance activities are governed by the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), which replaced the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines in 2008. During their development, alPHA had advocated for the inclusion of a separate and distinct program focused on the Social Determinants of Health (Resolution attached). Although this was not realized, the social determinants of health are referred to throughout the OPHS, obliging local public health agencies to address the determinants of health in a broad range of population-based activities, which are aimed at improving the health of the population, at least in part, through the reduction of health inequities.

Although it has been repeated countless times in the past half-century, the idea that health is "not merely the absence of disease" continues to become more widely accepted and more deeply understood. Policymakers and citizens alike are increasingly disassociating the notion of health from treatments and cures, linking it instead with upstream factors such as healthy choices and interventions aimed at preventing ill health. As this understanding deepens further, it becomes clear that seemingly simple decisions like eating a healthy diet, engaging in physical activity and avoiding specific risk factors to health are choices that are not equally available to all people. This in turn leads to further understanding of the links between factors such as poverty, social exclusion, poor childhood development and lack of education, and poor health.

Our members are committed to advocating for stronger public policies that reflect this clearly demonstrated reality, fully endorse the content and recommendations of the *Closing the Gap in a Generation* report, and will use them to reinforce our efforts and partnerships to make further progress in eliminating health inequities within Ontario, while supporting broader efforts to do likewise nationally and globally.

You will note that as part of this commitment, we are sharing this letter with decision-makers at Ontario's Ministry of Health Promotion, the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, federal and provincial ministries responsible for Canada's First Nations people, and others throughout Canada's public health community, and urging them to determine their roles in implementing the recommendations of the CSDH report.

Again, we congratulate and thank the CSDH for providing this valuable resource to lend further strength to our collective efforts to achieve health equity through action on the social determinants of health.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED

Linda Stewart,
Executive Director

Copy: Hon. Margaret Best, Minister of Health Promotion (Ontario)
Hon. Brad Duguid, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs (Ontario)
Hon. Chuck Strahl, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Canada)
Dr. Vivek Goel, President and CEO, Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion
Dr. Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer of Health (Ontario)
Dr. David Butler-Jones, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada
Dr. Perry Kendall, Co-Chair, Pan-Canadian Public Health Network
Dr. Cordell Neudorf, Chair, Canadian Public Health Association
Dr. Monique Bégin, WHO-CSDH Commissioner (Canada)
Connie Uetrecht, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association

Encl.

alPHa RESOLUTION A09-5

TITLE: World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health (WHO-CSDH): Call to Action for Ontario Public Health

SPONSOR: Sudbury & District Board of Health

WHEREAS alPHa has an established position and track record on action and advocacy on reducing health inequities through action on the social determinants of health including the establishment of the alPHa-OPHA Joint Work Group on the Social Determinants of Health; and

WHEREAS There is increasing *global-to-local* understanding and concern about persisting and widening health inequities, defined as unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries and mostly attributable to social determinants; and

WHEREAS The CSDH was established by the WHO in 2005 to respond to this increasing concern and to provide advice on how to reduce health inequities; and

WHEREAS Canada played a key role in supporting the work of the CSDH including the participation of Commissioner Monique Bégin, the engagement of the Public Health Agency of Canada and leadership in two of the CSDH's Knowledge Networks; and

WHEREAS The CSDH launched its final report, *Closing the Gap in a Generation*, in August 2008 which contained three overarching recommendations to close the health gap:

1. Improve daily living conditions
2. Tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money, and resources
3. Measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action including related implications for local government (including the health sector) and civil society; and

WHEREAS The *Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion's* (MHP) Strategic Plan recognizes the importance of social and economic factors in determining health; the legislative purpose and objects of the *Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion* (OAHPP) include the reduction of health inequities; and the *Ontario Public Health Standards* (OPHS) require all boards of health to assess, plan, deliver, manage, and evaluate programs to reduce inequities in health while at the same time maximizing the health gain for the whole population;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that alPHa congratulates the CSDH for its work and endorses the content and recommendations of the WHO – CSDH final report;

AND FURTHER that alPHa calls on the MHP and the OAHPP to immediately begin work to determine their respective leadership roles in implementing the WHO – CSDH recommendations and in supporting boards of health to do the same;

AND FURTHER that alPHa works in partnership with boards of health to identify opportunities for

individual and collective board action to reduce health inequities through the implementation of the Ontario Public Health Standards;

AND FINALLY that alPHa widely communicates its support for the WHO – CSDH and this resolution to the Ontario and Canadian public health community, including the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, and the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health, and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs for Ontario and the Minister for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

ACTION FROM CONFERENCE:

Moved: P. Sutcliffe (Sudbury)

Seconded: R. Pellizzari (Peterborough)

Resolution CARRIED AS AMENDED

2005 aPHa Resolution A05-14

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

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

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;

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".