

Honourable Tony Clement
Minister of Industry
C.D. Howe Building
235 Queen Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H5

July 21, 2010

Dear Minister Clement,

Re. Discontinuing the Mandatory Long-Form Census Questionnaire

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 express our disagreement with your decision to discontinue the mandatory long-form Canadian Census questionnaire in favour of a voluntary National Household Survey during the 2011 census.

For longer than Canada has been a country, the census has provided high quality information about her residents and communities, which has aided policymakers at all governance levels to make well informed policy decisions that are for the good of the Canadian public. The rich data generated have long been used by researchers and analysts to examine societal trends, identify areas of need, inform policy interventions, and demonstrate value for money in the use of public resources.

Ontario's public health units for example are mandated by the Ontario Public Health Standards to undertake population health assessments and surveillance and are specifically required to gather data on socio-demographics including population counts by age, sex, education, employment, income, housing, language, immigration, culture, ability/disability among others. The census is the sole source of much of this required information, and it is in turn applied to planning for effective and efficient delivery of programs and services.

It is widely accepted that the census data as reported through Statistics Canada are the gold standard for this type of information, as its mandatory responses and large sample size provide unassailable statistical reliability. This reliability will be severely compromised under a voluntary system, and so in turn will the ability to properly assess the best use of public resources or inform policy responses to address community public health needs.

This of course is not limited to public health. Compromising the richest and most reliable source of data we have on the characteristics of the Canadian population – from the national level right down to the individual census tract – compromises the very foundation for making sound decisions about how to best serve the public good at all levels.

We are therefore strongly urging you to reverse this short-sighted decision and reinstate the

mandatory long-form questionnaire as part of the 2011 Canadian Census.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Valerie Sterling". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Valerie Sterling
President
Association of Local Public Health Agencies
(aLPHa)

Copy: Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada
Munir A. Sheikh, Chief Statistician of Canada