



Ontario Public Health Association
 l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario
 Established/Établi 1949

The mission of OPHA is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health and to strengthen the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario.

May 13, 2008

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Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals
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Public Health Research, Education and
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Charitable Registration
 Number 11924 8771 RR0001

The Honourable Deb Matthews
 Minister of Children and Youth Services
 900 Bay Street, M1-57, MacDonald Block
 Macdonald Block
 Toronto ON M7A 1R3

Dear Minister Matthews:

RE: Public Consultations

On behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) I am writing to congratulate you in your capacity as Chair of the Government of Ontario's Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction on the initiation of public consultations on the reduction of poverty in Ontario and to offer a suggestion to enhance the consultation mechanism as it is currently implemented.

OPHA has supported the poverty reduction initiative since its inception and, in preliminary discussions with some of your staff, we have articulated advocacy positions on such issues as Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates the Ontario Child Benefit and the minimum wage. We are confident that as the process matures, the strategies that emerge will reflect the collective wisdom of the people of Ontario and lead towards well-considered measures that will make this province one of the best places to live, work and raise a family.

To this end, we would like to suggest that a more concerted effort be made to include the voices of the people who are the primary beneficiaries of the poverty reduction initiative in the consultation proceedings. While technology has made it possible for many people to participate through the Internet, poverty creates barriers of access and education that inadvertently exclude many of those voices in the very population that the initiative is designed to serve. The widely acknowledged best practice in all helping professions—respecting the voices of the recipients of assistance in the crafting of solutions designed to address their needs—is within the capacity of Ontario's government and we would urge you to consider ways to implement it. One approach might be to fund a local social service agency in every riding to create a vehicle that accommodates these voices and allows the messages to be subsequently conveyed to your staff. In this way, more of the ideals of our democracy could be realized and social acceptance of the action plan that is eventually created could be maximized.

OPHA acknowledges that there are significant challenges inherent in implementing plans of this nature and we stand ready to offer our assistance in bringing this important aspect of the anti-poverty initiative to fruition. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this request, or entertain our offer of assistance, please be sure to contact us.

I look forward to hearing from you in this regard.

Sincerely

Carol Timmings
 President