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December 2, 2005

Hon. Jim Watson
Minister of Health Promotion
250 Yonge Street, 35th Floor
Toronto ON M5B 2N5

Dear Minister Watson,

On the anniversary of the release of the Chief Medical Officer of Health's *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives* report at the Ontario Public Health Association conference last year, we wanted to take this opportunity to re-affirm our support for its immediate implementation. The good news is that the obesity epidemic is potentially reversible, and with concerted action from all sectors (government, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and communities), we will effect change. We would like to underscore the importance of a balanced and comprehensive portfolio that will address the environmental, social, and cultural factors that are driving the obesity epidemic.

While we have been delighted by recently announced initiatives aimed at increasing physical activity levels of Ontarians, the report *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives*, as well as recommendations from the World Health Organization both emphasize that a comprehensive, multi-sectoral strategy that promotes both physical activity and healthy eating is required. With more than a quarter of children and youth and more than half of the adult population overweight or obese, this epidemic is truly a population-wide problem and not just a condition affecting certain "high risk" groups. That said, we do need to tailor our strategies to the diverse needs of Ontario's communities, and to fully recognize the unique contexts within which these programs must be delivered to have any meaningful impact.

Important elements of a comprehensive healthy weights strategy should include the following:

1. Effective mass media campaigns to increase awareness and promote available healthy eating (e.g., Eat Smart! restaurant and cafeteria program) and physical activity programs.
2. Community-level pilot funding for public health units to work as part of inter-sectoral coalitions to implement innovative community nutrition and physical activity programs and to evaluate their impact. Your ministry could provide a menu of program options that show promise/have been shown to be

effective in other jurisdictions, to stimulate local action.

3. Evidence-based policies that encourage healthy eating and physical activity in a range of sectors (e.g., assessing policy options to restrict food advertising targeted at children under 13; evaluating the impact that increasing social assistance rates would have on eating patterns; investigating the extent to which costs, such as user fees for recreational facilities, registration fees or taxes on recreational programs and third party liability insurance, are a barrier to physical activity).
4. Evidence-based programs that encourage healthy eating and physical activity in a range of sectors (e.g. EatSmart! Restaurant, Workplace Cafeteria and School Cafeteria program, Health Check™, an education program that helps shoppers make wise food choices, the Living School Initiative which brings together communities to work together to support and enhance active, healthy living for children and youth, and good food boxes, local buying programs, community gardens and collective kitchens).
5. Ongoing province-wide chronic disease risk factor surveillance to monitor, for instance, dietary intake, physical activity and weight, and over time, the impact of our policies and programs.

Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions. If you have any questions, please contact Nancy Wai, 519-383-8331, ext. 601.

Sincerely,

Dr. Garry Aslanyan
President, Ontario Public Health Association