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March 4, 2002

**To: The Honourable Jim Flaherty
Minister of Finance**

Dear Mr. Flaherty:

On behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) I am writing to thank you for the opportunity to participate at the February 28th roundtable as part of "Your Bright Ideas Budget Tour".

The OPHA represents over 3000 individuals practicing public and community health throughout Ontario. These individuals represent a variety of sectors and disciplines, which have an interest in improving the health of the people of Ontario.

As Minister of Finance you will appreciate our message that investing in disease prevention and health promotion contributes to the well being of the people of Ontario and to the sustainability of the health care system.

OPHA feels that the Government of Ontario must spend its health dollars wisely, looking to redirect those dollars to interventions and activities that have been proven to be effective. We know for example that the prevention of one low birth weight baby will result in savings of over \$600,000 in medical and hospital care over a lifetime for that baby. We know for example that providing Hepatitis B vaccine to school age children saves \$1.71 for every dollar spent, or that the provision of flu vaccine for seniors reduces sickness and/or death significantly.

The Government of Ontario has introduced its Healthy Babies/Healthy Children based on this approach of investing in prevention. We applaud this initiative and argue that it is now time to expand this approach to children in school. Creating a healthy school environment, one that supports healthy nutritional opportunities, one that encourages school boards to develop healthy curriculum in conjunction with local public health units, one that fosters the healthy mental development of the school children are examples of how the creation of a comprehensive healthy school program is a "bright idea" for

the child, for the school and for the Province.

Another success story for the Ministry of Health has been its Ontario Heart Health Project. This locally based program supported by a central resource centre has been extremely successful in creating and sustaining local networks to increase the awareness of risk factors for cardiovascular disease. The success of this model should be adopted for a wider chronic disease prevention strategy and the OPHA supports the expansion of the heart health project and its resource centre to do so.

In conclusion let me reiterate that OPHA appreciates the opportunity to state its message that investing in disease prevention and health promotion are crucial to the health of the people of Ontario and to the sustainability of its health care system. We look forward to future opportunities to work in partnership with the Provincial government and other sectors as we strive to make Ontario as healthy as possible.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jack Lee
Executive Director (Acting), OPHA