



May 15, 2019

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Hepburn Block
10th Floor
80 Grosvenor St.
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

Attention: Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Deputy Premier

Re: Modernizing Ontario's Public Health Units

Dear Minister Elliott,

Health is *more* than Healthcare

As members of Health Promotion Ontario (HPO), we are writing in response to the Provincial Government's announcement regarding the 'Modernizing of Ontario's Public Health Units', referenced in the 2019 Provincial Budget.

HPO has been the *voice* of Health Promotion professionals across Ontario for over 30 years. We have dedicated members throughout Ontario representing public health units, community health centres, universities, and other health-oriented organizations. HPO seeks to advance the critical importance of health promotion and its practice through professional development, membership, member communication, and advocacy.

The World Health Organization defines Health Promotion as the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. Health Promotion moves beyond a focus on individual behaviour towards a range of social and environmental interventions.

For over 40 years in Canada, health promotion has been instrumental in efforts to invest in people's health, including a life-course perspective to population health as a way of reducing the rising costs in healthcare. But this is not the only thing which determines people's health. Our health is shaped by social, environmental, and political factors including education levels, food security, affordable housing, and sustainable transportation. Health Promotion focuses on reducing these health inequities. Health Promotion aims to provide equal opportunities and resources to enable all people to achieve their full health potential. Health Promotion focuses on prevention, promotion and well-being of societies. It moves beyond the bio-medical model of 'treatment'; adopting a social determinants of health approach.

A key guiding framework that has been fundamental for Health Promotion discourse is the Ottawa Charter established in 1986. The Ottawa Charter puts forth **five strategic actions**. These are: 1) establishing healthy public policies, 2) creating healthy and supportive environments, 3)



empowering community action, 4) developing personal skills, and 5) reorienting health services. Working to enact and influence each of these actions is an ongoing priority for the field of Health Promotion.

The field is further guided by the Pan-Canadian Health Promoter Competencies which were created to standardize the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for health promotion practice. Along with health protection, research, and other important elements of the public health system; health promotion remains a strong core function of public health.

Health Promotion has been an important catalyst to improving health outcomes in Ontario. This perhaps is best demonstrated through the development of policies and supports that led to the establishment of the Smoke Free Ontario Act.

Through this action, smoking rates have decreased in Ontario from 24.5% in 2000 to 12.9% in 2017. [i] The significant reduction in tobacco use and exposure is the result of a comprehensive tobacco control strategy. Public engagement, communications and education has strengthened community action and led to legislation and regulatory frameworks that protect and promote the health of the people of Ontario. The creation of an environment that supports smoke-free living combined with an integrated smoking cessation delivery system and prevention programming in schools, workplaces and community settings have contributed to the success of tobacco control. Health promotion is the process that enabled individuals to take greater control over their health and decrease tobacco use and exposure.

[i] 24.5 taken from SFO: The Next Chapter. CCHS survey data. 12.9% from Waterloo's Tobacco Use in Canada.

Health Promotion and health promoters bring great value to the field of public health by:

- advancing knowledge of health and its determinants.
- analysing complex issues regarding how health is created and how health behaviours arise.
- operating strategically for change through effective programming, influencing healthy public policy, empowering communities, and contributing to healthy environments.

Health Promotion Ontario is concerned with the changes outlined for Ontario's public health units. As the members of HPO, we urge you to consider the impact health promotion efforts have had on population health and hallway medicine, and the healthcare system costs that will increase if funding is reduced to public health.

On behalf of our membership and those working in health promotion across the province, I would be pleased to discuss this further with you or Ministry representatives.

Sincerely,

Marty Mako

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Chair, Health Promotion Ontario (HPO)

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