



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.

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Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001

May 13, 2005

Dr. Sheela Basrur
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Hepburn Block, 10th Floor
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2C4

Dear Dr. Basrur:

Re: OPHA meeting re: Environmental Health Capacity

I am writing to request a meeting with you and/or your staff to discuss three items related to environmental health capacity in Ontario's public health sector. As you know, the OPHA Environmental Health Workgroup has been very actively engaged in research, policy analysis and advocacy on environmental health issues such as drinking water, recreational health, local and regional air quality, and children's health over the last several years. Many of the active members in the Environmental Health Workgroup work full-time on environmental health issues for public health units in Ontario. Those members would like very much to meet with you to discuss three items related to environmental health capacity:

1. The importance of developing a mandatory program for environmental health in Ontario;
2. Undertaking an assessment on environmental health capacity and needs in the public health sector in Ontario; and
3. Funding to continue and expand the OPHA environmental health activities.

Last June, the OPHA sent a letter to you expressing the importance of developing a mandatory program for environmental health to drive the development of environmental health capacity in the public health sector in Ontario, to which we received a positive response. At the OPHA General Meeting convened in November 2004, our members adopted a resolution that called for increasing environmental health capacity in Ontario's public health sector (see Resolution attached). Ralph Stanley, one of the members of the Environmental Health Workgroup, has had some preliminary conversations about this issue with Fred Ruff, and we would like to follow up on that conversation with a more formal meeting on the issue.

We believe that it would be very helpful to our discussions on mandatory public health programs if an assessment were conducted on environmental health capacity and needs in the Ministry's Public Health Branch and in public health units across the province. In our meeting with you, we would like to discuss the possibility of the Ministry funding the OPHA to conduct such an assessment or to explore with you and your staff other ways in which this assessment could be undertaken.

For the last 3 years, the OPHA has been operating an Environmental Health Program with base funding provided by the Gordon Foundation an Environmental Health (\$60,000/year for 3 years) and project-specific funding from various organizations including Environment Canada and the Laidlaw Foundation. While this funding has allowed us to do research, policy analysis and health promotion on air quality issues, it will run out in June, 2005. Furthermore, this funding was limited to air quality issues, and hence did not assist OPHA with its work related to children and the environment, water quality, pesticides use and other emerging issues. We would like to discuss how the Ministry might support OPHA to continue environmental health policy analysis work to our mutual benefit.

We would find it very helpful to meet with you and your staff in person to discuss these three items. Please contact Theresa Schumilas, the Chair of the Environmental Health Workgroup, directly to make arrangements. She can be reached at 519-883-2254 or stheresa@region.waterloo.on.ca.

Sincerely,

Dr. Garry Aslanyan
President, Ontario Public Health Association

cc. Dr. Phil Jackson, Strategic Planning and Implementation Branch
John Garcia, Director, Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotions Branch, MOHLTC
Liz McCreight, MOHLTC
Fred Ruff, MOHLTC
Theresa Schumilas, Chair, Environmental Health Work Group