

Our Mission

Promote the inclusion of activities to address the social determinants of health within the mandate of local Public Health units

Advocate provincially and nationally for reducing health inequities

Present one Ontario Public Health voice on issues related to the social determinants of health

Contact us:

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OPHA & ALPHA launch a new joint working group!

We are a joint working group sponsored by the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) and the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (ALPHA). Our membership is drawn from both organizations, demonstrating broad commitment for Ontario's Public Health system to take action on social conditions that determine health.

Our purpose is to provide leadership and common messaging related to the social determinants of health and how Ontario's Public Health system can act.

Key Directions

Our efforts have concentrated on 2 key directions:

Influencing the Public Health Mandate

For the past few months, we have been actively advocating to strengthen the Public Health mandate and practice in relation to taking action on social determinants of health. Our activities to date have included:

- Hosting a partnership forum with established stakeholders at the 2007 OPHA conference to explore the role of the Joint Working Group on Social Determinants of Health
- Participating in the development process for the Performance Management Framework and the Program Protocols of the Ontario Public Health Standards in order to incorporate action on reducing health inequities
- Reviewing and commenting on the revised Ontario Public Health Standards using a social determinants of health perspective

The Ontario Public Health Standards are built upon the understanding that a set of underlying conditions determine the health of Ontarians. Income and social status are noted as key determinants of health. Often, population health outcomes are influenced disproportionately by sub-populations who experience poor health as a result of economic and / or social conditions. The new Ontario Public Health Standards direct Boards of Health to ensure that barriers to programs, such as economic circumstances, are minimized. Public Health units are also required to monitor and report on the determinants of health and health inequities.

Poverty Prevention Strategy Websites and Networks:

Growing Stronger Together - Ontario Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy

Campaign 2000

Campaign 2000 - Ontario

- Poverty Reduction Plan for Ontario - What Actions Can You Take?
- The Road Ahead: Poverty Reduction in Ontario

Poverty Watch Ontario

Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISARC)

- The Transition Child Benefit - Factsheet

Why Is It So Tough to Get Ahead (John Stapleton)

Anti-Poverty Strategies in Canada and Elsewhere (Canadian Social Research Links)

National Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology - report on poverty, June 2008

Poverty Quiz – Test your knowledge about family poverty in Canada

Influencing the Poverty Prevention Strategy

Poverty is a key social determinant of health and the current government's commitment to poverty reduction is encouraging. Last year the government announced a Senate Committee, chaired by Minister Deb Mathews. The Senate Committee will develop a focused strategy for poverty reduction, including indicators and targets. Since this announcement, our Working Group has been active in bringing a Public Health perspective to the Senate Committee's work.

Our Position:

We stand in solidarity with Campaign 2000, the Social Planning Network of Ontario and the 25 in 5 network.

We advocate for:

- A 25% reduction in child poverty rates over 5 years and at least a 50% reduction over 10 years
- The development of indicators to track employment security, income security, food security, child care access, housing, education and training
- Monitoring poverty using the following indicators: A relative poverty measure, a deprivation index and a measure of absolute poverty
- A coordinated multi-year action plan with budget allocations
- Annual monitoring and evaluation of poverty prevention programs, policies and strategies
- Implementing OW and ODSP rates that reflect the real cost of living, including housing and food and that are indexed annually to reflect inflation
- Setting the shelter component maximum for OW clients at 85% of the median market rent for each local housing market, based on annual surveys conducted by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- Ramping up the timeline for the \$10.25/hr minimum wage
- Annually indexing minimum wage to inflation
- Launching a review of the Employment Standards Act to ensure vulnerable workers are protected

Perhaps most importantly, we have emphasized the need for setting and achieving clear targets for poverty prevention. We have impressed upon the government that effective poverty prevention requires a multi-year strategy with targeted investments and horizontal integration across programs and policies.

Beyond Mitigation

We also brought to the attention of the Provincial government that recently announced programs will provide increased access and support to vulnerable populations. Initiatives like access to dental care, subsidies for recreation and school nutrition programs, and the universal Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program provide support to vulnerable populations and are effective population health policies and programs. We anticipate that these programs will make a difference in the lives of Ontarians. However, there is little evidence that they will reduce the incidence of poverty.