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January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty  
Premier of Ontario  
Legislative Building, Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON. M7A 1A1

Dear Premier,

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) applauds your commitment to young children and their families through your endorsement of Dr. Charles Pascal's report entitled "With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario". This ambitious plan builds on the strengths of the province's Best Start strategy, and is transformative in nature. The recommendations extend well beyond full-day learning for 4 and 5 year olds to include before and after school programs for 6-12 year olds, improved access to services for families, and new family-friendly parental leave policies.

OPHA is pleased to see that this vision for the early years includes public health services. Ontario's public health services are mandated by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, pursuant to Section 7 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act. The Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) are published as guidelines for the provision of this mandate. For example, the Reproductive Health Standard enables individuals and families to prepare for parenthood and experience a healthy preconception and pregnancy, to achieve optimal health of their newborn. Similarly, the Child Health Standard enables all children to attain and sustain optimal health and developmental potential. Given the consistency between these goals and the goals of the Early Learning and Care Plan, the OPHA fully supports the vision and recommendations of Dr. Pascal. We believe that this plan will provide Ontario families with significant benefits and will alleviate the current patchwork of services and accountability.

The report includes a number of recommendations that will have a direct impact on Ontario public health services for prenatal women and families with young children. It will impact how public health units plan and work with community partners, how they receive funding, and how they deliver family health services. On January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010 the OPHA came together with colleagues from municipalities, public health agencies, and other community agencies, for a forum focused on Ontario's early years' landscape and this landmark report.

OPHA calls on the Premier to formally endorse the full Early Learning and Care Plan as outlined by Dr. Pascal. In addition, the OPHA has identified a number of recommendations that will support and enhance the quality and accessibility of public health services to Ontario families, as this ambitious plan is further developed and implemented.

These recommendations, described in more detail in the attached document, are as follows:

1. establish comprehensive inter-ministry collaboration and coordination;
2. ensure that decisions related to the Early Learning and Care Plan recommendations are based on a sound understanding of public health's mandate, accountability, funding and programming;
3. include public health as an integral part of the planning process right from the beginning; and
4. fund public health services, including Healthy Babies Healthy Children program, at a level that is adequate to meet community need and is sustainable.

We ask that the Premier carefully consider these recommendations in order to ensure that Ontario's vision for Early Learning and Care is fully and successfully realized.

We are committed to working with our government funders and our early years community partners to support planning and implementation of this transformation of the early years system.

For further information about the role of public health within the Early Learning and Care Plan and/or the recommendations proposed by OPHA, please contact Susan Makin, Chair of OPHA's Child and Youth Health Workgroup, at 416-338-7832 or [smakin@toronto.ca](mailto:smakin@toronto.ca).

Sincerely



Liz Haugh  
President