

As the “**Voice of Public Health**” in Ontario, OPHA strongly encourages the provincial parties to renew their commitment to ensuring that the environments we live in are planned, built and governed in accordance with core public health foundations. A healthy population is ultimately the best strategy for enhancing overall quality of life and controlling the burdens and costs of preventable illness and death. An effective and comprehensive approach to achieving this includes the incorporation of Health Promotion and Education, Disease and Injury Prevention, and Health Protection and Emergency Response. The following key issues were identified, and the recommendations were developed, with a system-wide and systematic perspective.

### The Built Environment

The ways in which our communities are built, impact heavily on the population's health and quality of life. The built environment is a cross-cutting issue that encompasses a number of public health concerns, including air quality, tobacco, climate change, children's health, food insecurity, bedbugs and alcohol.

#### Recommendations:

- (1) In order to establish comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to health-oriented land use and community planning, an *Inter-ministerial Steering Committee* should be established with representatives from the Ministries of Health Promotion and Sport, Health and Long-term Care, Transportation, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Education and the Environment.
- (2) To help raise awareness, create behavior change and shift public attitudes towards complete communities, a *Provincial Social Marketing Campaign* should be developed on Health Protective and Health Promoting Community Design.

### Air Quality:

Although there are indications that Ontario's air quality is improving, there is increasing research showing a range of chronic and acute health risks related to the air we breathe.

#### Recommendations:

- (1) Toxics Reduction legislation should be enhanced to include more of the emitting sectors, lower emission thresholds, and small and medium sized enterprises, in order to estimate the burden of illness within local communities and inform the public.
- (2) The cumulative impacts of multiple emitters in an air shed should be considered when identifying the burden of illness in a local community and when making decisions on Certificate of Approvals, Environmental Assessments and other land use planning decisions.
- (3) Enhanced localized air monitoring and other tools should be made available to health units to assist in identifying community health impacts of air pollution.
- (4) The *Air Quality Health Index* should be adopted province-wide to create a clear and effective reference for health protection.

### Tobacco:

It's well documented that tobacco products are the leading cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario. In relation to air quality, the inhalation of tobacco smoke continues to be a major concern in both public and private spaces. The *Tobacco Strategy Advisory Group* (TSAG) has prepared an effective report to help prevent the use of tobacco, especially by young people, and to protect Ontarians from second-hand smoke.

#### Recommendations:

- (1) The recommendations contained in the TSAG report should be fully adopted.
- (2) Priority should be given to ending the cycle of tobacco addiction by providing free smoking cessation medications for individuals under the Ontario Drug Benefit and taking action on the supply and sale of contraband tobacco products.

## Climate Change:

In addition to air quality concerns, the health impacts of climate change in Ontario also involve extreme heat and other extreme weather events, water quality, and vector borne diseases.

### Recommendations:

- (1) The capacity of the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) and local health units should be assessed and enhanced in order to effectively respond to health related risks of climate change.
- (2) The need for regional scale studies of adaptive measures for health protection should be assessed by the MOHLTC and Ontario Agency of Health Protection and Promotion (OAHPP).
- (3) Communications should be increased to public health partners on progress with the Regional Adaptation Collaborative and updates on other health impacts initiatives on climate change.

## Children's Environmental Health:

It is important to address the greater vulnerability and childhood burden of illness relating to exposures in our built environments.

### Recommendations:

- (1) Environmental health surveillance capacity should be enhanced by adopting the indicators developed by the Association of Public Health Epidemiologists of Ontario (APHEO), collaborating with partners to identify data sources and share data, and exploring promising practices in other jurisdictions (e.g. Centre for Disease Control's Environmental Public Health Tracking Network).
- (2) Public health capacity to raise awareness of harmful exposures to children should be enhanced.
- (3) The *School Health Curriculum* and *Early Learning and Care Vision* should be fully implemented.

## Food Insecurity:

Food insecurity and hunger have negative impacts on health, quality of life and health care costs. Low incomes and economic barriers are the most common cause of household food insecurity for Ontarians.

### Recommendations:

- (1) A \$100 per month Healthy Food Supplement should be implemented for social assistance recipients and a tax credit of equal value for low income workers in Ontario.
- (2) A multi-sectoral food strategy and partnership should be developed, implemented and co-ordinated to actively improve access to affordable, healthy food in underserved neighbourhoods.

## Bedbugs:

The need for an integrated and modern approach is strongly evident in addressing the pervasive and multifaceted problem of bedbugs. Although the issue is universal, the current experience in Ontario suggests that there are certain vulnerable segments of the population that are more frequently involved.

### Recommendations:

- (1) A multi-sectoral bedbug strategy and partnership should be developed, implemented and co-ordinated to actively improve the surveillance and control of infestations, while also addressing the underlying factors that are experienced by those commonly affected.
- (2) An enhanced awareness and education campaign that actively reaches both the public and service providers should be developed and implemented.

## Alcohol:

The health costs attributed to alcohol outweigh any economic benefit gained from alcohol sales and taxes.

### Recommendations:

- (1) A provincial alcohol strategy should be developed and implemented using a cross-departmental approach to actively control access and consumption while increasing intervention and education.