



Ontario Public Health Association

l'Association pour la santé publique de l'Ontario

Established/Établi 1949

The Voice of Public Health Since 1949

Voter's Guide

**Designed for use in municipal,
provincial and federal elections.**

OPHA Advocacy Committee

April 2003



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Introduction

About the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA)

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) is a provincial voluntary association of individuals and constituent societies from various sectors and disciplines in Ontario who promote the optimal health of the public.

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 community and public health throughout Ontario.

While OPHA responds to emerging public health issues, the Board of Directors establishes key strategic policy issues which are addressed throughout the year. The strategic goals are:

1.0 Advocacy

- 1.1 Enhance the association's capacity for policy analysis and action.
- 1.2 Shift public health practice toward further integration of broad determinants of health.
- 1.3 Raise awareness, change public attitudes and actions which support public health issues.

2.0 Program Development

- 2.1 Develop programmes that increase the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of public health programs in Ontario.

3.0 Professional Development

- 3.1 Explore the development of core public health competencies in collaboration with constituent societies.
- 3.2 Develop continuing education opportunities focused on core public health competencies.

4.0 Membership Development

- 4.1 Increase collaboration and involvement with constituent societies.
- 4.2 Broaden and increase membership, including practitioners not affiliated with a constituent society, new graduates, people new to public health, and non-public health agencies.

5.0 Profile and Linkages

- 5.1 Increase public and practitioner recognition of OPHA as the voice of public health.
- 5.2 Increase media awareness and recognition of OPHA
- 5.3 Increase linkages with education and research institutions.
- 5.4 Strengthen and expand partnerships with organizations that also address the broad determinants of health
- 5.5 Market the benefits of staff involvement in OPHA workgroups to public health managers and Medical Officers of Health.
- 5.6 Increase and strengthen OPHA's linkages with various ministries on public health issues.

OPHA has several issue-specific workgroups, which are initiated by members, although you do not have to be a member to join. Workgroups are run on a voluntary basis. There are presently 9 workgroups at OPHA:

- Alcohol
- Breastfeeding Promotion
- Child Health
- Environmental Health
- Food Biotechnology
- Food Security
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Two Spirit, Queer and Questioning Equity
- Urban Health; and
- Violence Prevention

Workgroup profiles are available on the OPHA website at www.opha.on.ca/workgroups/index.html. OPHA position papers, resolutions and motions are also on the website.

About this Guide

OPHA has heard statements from politicians and community and public health workers that public health is invisible. We need to raise awareness and an election is an opportunity to do just that.

In keeping with OPHA's mission, this guide is designed to support people who work in community and public health throughout Ontario.

In this guide, you will find a list of useful resources on election processes and general advocacy. In addition, we have developed tips for meeting with election candidates, and offer sample letters to both candidates and newspaper editors.

Any or all of these sections may be used to promote key community and public health messages to your election candidates.

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Reference: Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), Voter's Guide. April 2003.

Distribution: Copies of this report are available from the OPHA website at www.opha.on.ca/resources/voter.pdf



Resources

The following are useful sources of information:

Municipal

- Association of Municipalities of Ontario: www.amo.on.ca
- The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing web site offers *Candidate Guides* and *Nomination Forms* for Ontario municipal elections at www.mah.gov.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/nts_1_3195_1.html, as well as information on municipal restructuring at www.mah.gov.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/nts_1_3429_1.html

Provincial

- Elections Ontario: www.electionsontario.on.ca
- Ontario Legislative Assembly: www.ontla.on.ca

Federal

- Canadian Public Health Association: www.cpha.ca
- Elections Canada: www.elections.ca

General

- OPHA's PowerPoint presentation, *Guide to Advocacy*: www.opha.on.ca/resources/generic_advocacy.ppt
- Council of Canadians: www.canadians.org
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: www.policyalternatives.ca
- Canadian Policy Research Networks: www.cprn.ca
- Institute for Research on Public Policy: www.irpp.org
- Public Policy Forum: www.ppforum.com
- The Health Communication Unit, *Policy Development Resources*: www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/policy_resources.htm
- Single copies of *Making a Difference in Your Community: A Guide for Policy Change (1996)* are available from the OPHA office.



Tips for meeting with election candidates

- ⇒ **Make an appointment.** It's a good idea for at least two people to attend.
- ⇒ **Prepare for the meeting.** Expect to be somewhat nervous, but if you are well prepared, you will do well to educate the candidate on the issue.
- ⇒ Go with a specific purpose.
- ⇒ Cover only a few topics. We suggest **3 key messages**.
- ⇒ Have the relevant facts and figures on hand.
- ⇒ Provide illustrations of local policy change impact.
- ⇒ Relate any adverse impact you may be aware of regarding local policy change.
- ⇒ Do not be argumentative.
- ⇒ Expect questions - do not expect the candidates to know as much as you about the issues that you are addressing.
- ⇒ Offer assistance or further information.
- ⇒ **Leave a fact sheet or brief.**
- ⇒ **Thank the candidate** for their time and courtesy.
- ⇒ **Follow up** with a thank you letter reinforcing key messages and any promised information.
- ⇒ Congratulate yourself for a job well done!



Sample letters

Letters to election candidates

Letters can be sent to candidates in advance of personal interviews or public forums to allow the candidate an opportunity to give some thought to issues before being confronted with questions.

Remember to include the brief statement of key messages.

Letters to newspaper editors

- ⇒ The “letters to the editor” section of newspapers has a very high readership. This section is usually monitored by politicians and other opinion shapers as a gauge of the direction that the winds of public opinion are blowing.
- ⇒ Letters do not need to be lengthy. Take a look at the “letters to the editor” section of the newspaper to which you will be writing. **Letters are usually not more than 300 words in length.**
- ⇒ Begin the letter by referring to the issue or the title and date of publication of the item you are going to discuss.
- ⇒ **Deal with only one topic and focus on one major message.** Aim for a straightforward, factual approach.
- ⇒ Avoid indulging in emotional or broad sweeping statements that a few weeks later may look embarrassing.
- ⇒ It is important to **get your letter off quickly while the issue is still topical.** This will increase your chances of publication. Try to fax or email your letter - it is faster.
- ⇒ If not printed the first time, don’t hesitate to try again!

Sample Letter to Candidate

Date

Name

Address

Dear...

[Identify yourself & affiliation, if applicable] I am writing to you because I care about health.

There is evidence that health is determined by income and social factors such as: personal support networks, level of education, employment and working conditions, and I believe that public and community health workers are key in advocating for and intervening with the general public to influence the underlying determinants of health.

However, I also feel that it is the responsibility of the government to support public and community health by shifting the emphasis to health promotion/disease prevention; fostering strong and supportive families and communities; ensuring safe, high quality physical environments; and providing accessible, affordable and appropriate services for all.

While I believe that current allocations to the health care system are adequate, inequitable distribution within the system means that community and public health resources are inadequate. Inadequate funding has resulted in a decreased capacity of Public Health Units to engage their communities in effective life-saving and cost-reducing preventive strategies. This has had an impact most recently on those who have been directly and indirectly affected by contaminated water. Through education, monitoring, and partnering with agencies and people throughout the community, public health has a vital role in municipalities across Ontario in preventing illness and promoting the health its citizens.

[INSERT YOUR OWN LOCAL EXAMPLE HERE]

Sample Letter to Candidate, cont'd

Without adequate funding, it is probable that these activities will have to be reduced or eliminated, to the detriment of our community.

Public and community health activities have a long-term impact on the health and well-being of communities. The desirable secondary impact on the economy includes savings in health care dollars as well as in other sectors such as social benefits, child welfare and the criminal justice system.

Despite the clear benefits of investing in preventive strategies, community and public health have experienced a net decrease in resource allocation. Community/public health must be an equal partner in the health care system. Equitable distribution of health care resources will have long-term positive impacts on both the health and prosperity of individuals throughout the province of Ontario. I support the shifting of fiscal resources to further support the public and community health systems and staff.

Sincerely,

Name

Phone number

Sample Letter to the Editor

Date

Name

Address

Letters to the Editor

[Identify yourself & affiliation, if any.]

Decisions made by the next *[municipal council / government of Ontario / federal government]* will have a major impact on the health of Ontario's citizens. We all recognize and support the need for high quality, accessible treatment services. We must also recognize that most of the progress made in reducing illness and death has come from preventive services and healthy public policies, such as water treatment, affordable housing, immunization, income support and injury prevention programs. Today, it is appropriate and timely health promotion and determinants of health strategies that make the greatest impact on health.

[Comment on a local event as example to bridge to next paragraph.]

These activities take place in or are supported by Public Health Units and other community health agencies. These important community services are currently threatened by funding shortages in the public sector.

For this reason, I support the role of public and community health agencies and encourage others to do the same for the benefit of our whole community.

Sincerely,

Name

Phone number

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