



Make Ontario the Healthiest Province

Pre-Budget Submission

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MAKE ONTARIO THE HEALTHIEST PROVINCE

Ontario is facing a health care crisis that is preventable. Chronic diseases currently cost the Ontario Government tens of billions of dollars every year, straining the health care system and the quality of life for those living with preventable disease. Prevention of costly chronic disease is possible through improved health policies and improved individual behaviours related to: physical activity; nutrition; reducing tobacco use; safe alcohol use; and, good mental health.

The Ontario government needs to build on its significant progress and leadership to ensure Ontario becomes the healthiest jurisdiction in North America as the 2015/16 budget is prepared. There are serious economic constraints to consider but it is critical that Ontario not lose ground and that recent gains and momentum in health promotion and chronic disease prevention are maintained. Fulfillment of the recommendations below will see both short and long-term results in decreased morbidity as well increased average life expectancy by over two years, making Ontario one of the jurisdictions with the highest life expectancy in the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Commit to accelerate and deepen health promotion efforts to achieve the following targets in these key factor areas by 2018:**
 - More than 70 per cent of Ontarians are physically active.
 - More than 50 per cent of Ontarians eat fruit and vegetables more than 5 times per day.
 - Fewer than 30 per cent of Ontarians are either overweight or obese.
 - Fewer than 16 per cent of Ontarians do not exceed [Canada's Low Risk Drinking Guidelines](#).¹
 - Fewer than 15 per cent of Ontarians report experiencing negative mental health symptoms.²
 - Ontario to have the lowest smoking prevalence or smoking rate in Canada.

- **Embed a health impact filter across all government initiatives.**

A healthy province is one where the government embeds a health impact filter to ensure that all policies, legislation, regulations and programs are reviewed for potential effects on the population's health and well-being prior to their implementation in order to mitigate any potential harm and maximize positive health outcomes. "Health in all policies" is an internationally recognized gold standard in applying a health lens to all policy development including social and regional policy, taxation, environment, education and researchⁱ

- **Focus on reducing health inequities.**

Fifty percent of health outcomes are attributable to socio-economic factorsⁱⁱ. A reduction in health inequities can significantly reduce the number of Ontarians who experience poor or fair health.

¹ The Canadian Cancer Society recommends that if you choose to drink alcohol, reduce your cancer risk by keeping it to less than 1 drink a day for women and less than 2 drinks a day for men (this is lower than Canada's Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines).

² Dementia is an umbrella term for a variety of brain disorders that affect cognitive function. Mental illness and dementia, though not the same, are related and intertwined. The OCDPA target of reducing the number of people who self-report experiencing mental health symptoms includes symptoms related to dementia, including depression, anxiety, and stress.

BACKGROUND: Make Ontario the healthiest province in Canada:

A healthy province is one where its population is physically active; living in vibrant communities; has access to, and makes healthy food choices; has low to no tobacco use; is aware of and adheres to the low risk drinking guidelines; and has access to an integrated system of coordinated and effective promotion, prevention, early intervention, and treatment programs for mental health issues. It's a province where everyone has equitable access to healthy options and enjoys the benefits of healthy living.

That is why 23 health-related, non-governmental organizations have united their voices through the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (OCDPA) to urge the government to commit to making Ontario the healthiest province through a sustained, comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy that includes strategic investments, effective policies, environmental supports, and public education to effect broad societal changes in health behaviours.

Sustainable health care requires greater focus on health promotion. In Canada, the cost of medical treatment for chronic disease has soared, costing Canadians \$190 billion annuallyⁱⁱⁱ and will continue to increase as the prevalence of chronic disease rises. For example, the Ontario government spends more than \$2 billion on costs related to cancer care^{iv}. The indirect costs associated with cancer, such as loss of productivity in Ontario, are approximately \$5 billion per year^v. The economic burden of diabetes in Ontario is expected to increase 42 per cent over the next decade to \$7 billion^{vi} by 2020. The annual total economic burden (including direct, indirect and opportunity costs) of dementia in Ontario is expected to increase by more than \$770 million per year through 2020^{vii}. A conservative estimate puts the total direct and indirect costs of serious lung diseases as more than \$4 billion in 2011. According to economic modelling, this could rise to more than \$300 billion by 2041^{viii}. Moreover, it is estimated that cardiovascular disease costs Ontario \$5.5 billion per year in direct and indirect costs^{ix}.

Ontario's health landscape is in dire need of attention. In Ontario, 181,000 people have dementia and this number is expected to increase^x. More than 2.4 million Ontarians are currently living with a serious lung disease^{xi}. Ontario has more people diagnosed with type 1 or 2 diabetes than the national average, with about 10 per cent of Ontarians population diagnosed with type 1 or type 2 diabetes^{xii}. All these numbers are set to climb if bold action is not taken.

But there is hope. Chronic disease can largely be preventable. In fact, when it comes to premature heart disease and stroke, research shows that up to 80 per cent of cases are preventable^{xiii}. And intervention on a provincial level works. Ontario's investment through the *Tobacco Control Act* and *Smoke Free-Ontario Act* has resulted in a decline of smoking prevalence from 50 per cent in the 1960s to about 19 per cent today^{xiv}.

The OCDPA recommends the government maintain its commitment to health promotion policies and programs that will help to prevent chronic disease in order to save hundreds of millions of dollars in health care costs. It will improve the province's economic productivity and prosperity and it will substantially improve the quality of life of every person in Ontario who can avoid preventable disease.



Chronic disease disproportionately affects those with lower incomes. In fact, almost half of all health outcomes are attributable to socio-economic factors^{xv}. Therefore, investing in health promotion means investing in health equity to ensure that everyone in the province has equal access to health initiatives and healthy choices. If all Ontarians had the same health as Ontarians with higher income, an estimated 318,000 fewer people would be in fair or poor health, an estimated 231,000 fewer people would be disabled, and there would be an estimated 3,373 fewer deaths each year among Ontarians living in metropolitan areas^{xvi}.

A healthy province is one where the government embeds a health impact filter to ensure that all policies, legislation, regulations and programs are reviewed for potential effects on the population's health and well-being prior to their implementation in order to mitigate any potential harm and maximize positive health outcomes. The aim is to increase positive health outcomes and minimize any negative impact on the population(s) affected. A health impact filter is especially critical to sectors outside of health to ensure that those who do not usually target health as a goal are still assessing and evaluating the impact of their decisions on the health and well-being of those who will or could be affected. For example, urban planners assessing how creating wider lanes for motor vehicles will affect people's ability to walk or take active transit in the community before they implement the project.

In order to make Ontario the healthiest jurisdiction in North America, a collaborative approach - which includes multi-sectors and stakeholders at the local, regional and provincial levels - must be taken to remove the barriers to improve the health of Ontarians. Ontario needs a multi-faceted strategy that includes effective policies, environmental supports, and public education to effect broad societal changes in health behaviours. With government leadership and commitment, the goal of making Ontario the healthiest province in Canada can be realized.

The OCDPA consists of 23 member organizations and is the province's collective voice on effective chronic disease prevention policy and programming. More information is available at <http://www.ocdpa.on.ca>

References and Citations

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