

About Ophea. Ophea is a charitable organization working toward an Ontario where all 2 million children and youth have the knowledge and skills they need to make informed choices about their health and well-being. In order to have the greatest impact, the majority of Ophea's work occurs in the school setting, as research has shown that implementing health interventions within schools has a positive impact on student health behaviours, assists in making connections to the broader community, and is a cost-effective approach to supporting health policies. Through our programs and services, Ophea effectively works with all 5,000 schools across Ontario (in English and French) and maintains relationships with key decision makers in schools boards (72), faculties of education (13), and public health units (36).

Policy to Action. In recent years, the Government of Ontario has established/updated a number of key policies (across ministries) that aim to improve the health and well-being of children and youth. These policies include:

- Ministry of Education (Health and Physical Education Curriculum (Grades 1 -12); Well-Being Strategy; Daily Physical Activity; Foundations for a Healthy School; School Board Policies on Concussions; Multiple Medical Conditions)
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (Public Health Standards; Mental Health and Addictions Strategy; Smoke-Free Ontario; Healthy Kids Strategy)
- Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Game ON; Rowan's Law)
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services (Gearing Up; Stepping Up)
- Ministry of the Status of Women (Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence)

Ophea commends the government on this policy work and believes in the potential for these policies, when implemented in a coordinated and strategic way, to have a positive impact on the lives of children and youth. However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable decrease in government investment and coordination of health promotion efforts, which has limited the overall effectiveness of these policies. While Ontario has taken the first step to create a rich foundation of health policy, it's lagging behind when it comes to implementation.

Want results? Look to schools. Ophea recommends that the 2018 provincial budget focuses on deeper implementation of these existing policies to enable children and youth - some of our most vulnerable populations - to build the knowledge and skills needed to lead healthy, active lives. Leading provinces like British Columbia are investing in school health at a rate of \$7.80 per student. Within Ontario this same level of investment per student, provided as an evergreen commitment, would mobilize schools and key provincial organizations to address these policies and ensure consistent and sustained progress towards our shared vision of building healthy schools and communities.

Ophea actively collaborates with government (MEDU, MOHLTC, MTCS, MSW, MCYS, MTO, MCI) and non-government agencies to support children and youth well-being initiatives in schools communities across Ontario. Healthy, active living is key to any prevention effort, and the school setting continues to provide multiple entry points to support student health and well-being with Ophea serving as a leading organization in this field. Ophea believes a comprehensive, coordinated school engagement strategy would include the following key components:

Deeper implementation - Health and Physical Education (H&PE) Curriculum. Ophea believes health promotion efforts would benefit from deeper implementation of existing, evidence based policies including the H&PE Curriculum, which builds students' knowledge and skills as they progress through the school system (starting at four years of age and continuing until they reach adulthood). It also offers the flexibility to be reactive to changes in our environment, and can support students, educators, and families to address emerging health issues as we've already experienced with mental health and cannabis use.

Reinforcing positive health behaviours - Ophea's Healthy Schools Certification. Ophea recognizes the importance of tailored, community-focused interventions and their ability to reinforce positive health behaviours and student well-being. Ophea's Healthy Schools Certification is based on a comprehensive school health model that supports school health teams to collaborate, take action, and report on their commitment to address a priority health topic in their school while receiving a Gold, Silver or Bronze level certification at the end of each school year. 1 in 15 Ontario schools currently participates in Healthy Schools Certification, with this number continuing to grow on an annual basis.

Daily physical activity across the school day. Ophea sees daily physical activity across the school day as a critical aspect of student well-being (including before/after school programs, classroom instruction, recess, and intramurals). By providing equitable, inclusive opportunities for students to be active in a safe environment (both physically and emotionally), we can enable a greater level of comfort in being active that students can carry into adulthood.

A cross-ministerial commitment would align objectives of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Ministry of the Status of Women, and others as appropriate. Ophea is prepared and positioned to mobilize the partnerships and programs required to realize the vision of schools as a community hub through which children and youth receive coordinated support related to their health and learning. Dedicated funding aimed at prevention and education will help an entire generation get a healthy start and realize their full potential to become personally successful, economically productive, and actively engaged citizens.

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Sincerely,



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