

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. Through our programs and services, Ophea works with all 5,000 schools across Ontario (in English and French) and maintains relationships with key decision makers in all 72 schools boards, 13 recognized faculties of education, and all 35 public health units. Ophea actively collaborates with government across several ministries, as well as with other non-government agencies to support children and youth well-being initiatives in school communities.

Ontario's school health context is evolving.

The government of Ontario is updating a number of key policies that aim to improve the health and well-being of children and youth to prepare them for the challenges of work and life. These policies and priorities include the 2019 Health and Physical Education curriculum, revisions to provincial concussion protocols, and responding to the recent cannabis legalization, amongst others.

Ontario schools need to focus on teaching students health skills that matter.

Schools serve all of Ontario's children, including those in our most vulnerable populations, and they provide multiple entry points to support student health and well-being. This government has an opportunity to build the knowledge and skills needed for children and youth in Ontario to lead healthy, active lives and to be economically productive and engaged citizens. Efficiencies exist for school health investments to be implemented in a more effective way and are key to any province-wide health promotion and prevention efforts.

In working together we are stronger and more effective.

Across Ontario, school boards and public health units have varied capacities to support effective implementation of the multitude of education and health policies and priorities. While the government of Ontario has released many initiatives over the past fifteen years, the overall effectiveness and impact of these efforts have been limited due to a lack of provincial coordination between investments. To increase success, and with limited provincial resources to support implementation of these important policies, ***Ophea is recommending the government of Ontario prioritize the coordination of school health investments.***

More than money, what's needed is coordination.

Supporting the effective coordination of school health investments by the government of Ontario ensures a positive impact on student health behaviours, it assists schools in making connections to the broader community, and it is a ***cost-effective approach*** to supporting many health policies. It means that every dollar spent is meaningfully applied where it's needed most and eliminates duplication and waste.

The government of Ontario can do this by:

- **Deeper Implementation** - focus on deeper and coordinated implementation of strategic policies that address the complexities of student health priorities. Policies such as the Health and Physical Education curriculum, that engage students, educators, and families to address emerging health issues such as mental health and cannabis use, are well situated to make a significant provincial impact on the overall health of this province.

- **Provincial Coordination** - work with key provincial organizations, including Ophea, to support school boards, public health units and faculties of education effectively implement and monitor provincial policies. Specifically, enhance provincial coordination to ensure investments are coordinated and aligned provincially and that our 72 school boards, 35 public health units, and 13 faculties of education are not developing duplicative resources, tools, and services to support government policy implementation. In strengthening provincial coordination the government of Ontario can ensure high quality, consistent implementation of provincial policy which will be more effective and efficient over previous strategies.
- **Cross-Ministerial Connections** - a cross-ministerial commitment would align investments in school health interventions across MEDU, MOHLTC, MTCS, MCCSS, and others as appropriate. Working across government on school health interventions would ensure alignment between policies, a greater degree of accountability, leveraged investments, and coordinated implementation.
- **Community Connections** - support proven policies and initiatives that build school and community connections. Policies and frameworks such as the Foundations for Healthy Schools (Ministry of Education) serve as a significant opportunity to strengthen community-focused interventions and reinforce positive student health behaviours. Ophea's provincial Healthy Schools Certification provides a quantifiable measure for schools to demonstrate that they are working with parents and the community to prioritize health topics that are locally driven.

Ophea welcomes the opportunity to provide input on planned government updates to provincial policies, including the Health and Physical Education curriculum. These policies, when implemented in a coordinated and strategic way, will have a significant impact on the lives of children and youth and can be done in a cost effective manner. Ophea is prepared and positioned to mobilize the partnerships and programs required to realize the intent of these policies and to assist government in implementation.

For more information please contact Chris Markham, Ophea's Executive Director & CEO, at chris@ophea.org or 416-426-7126.

Sincerely,



John Dance
President, Ophea



Chris Markham
Executive Director and CEO, Ophea