

## Activating A Culture of Health and Well-Being in Ontario 2017 Pre-Budget Submission

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Ontario has a rich foundation of health policy. It's time to start translating policy into results. From the revised 2015 Health and Physical Education curriculum, to the Foundations for a Healthy School, to the Healthy Kids Strategy, to the Healthy Choices Act, Ontario has made significant investments in the development of key policies that not only promote health and well-being, but aim to make it easier for people to make healthy choices. The reality, however, is that while these foundational building blocks are now in place, kids are still facing significant health risks from lack of physical activity and sleep<sup>i</sup>, to living with food insecurity<sup>ii</sup>, to an overabundance of anxiety and mental health challenges<sup>iii</sup>, and substance use including the process of legalizing marijuana<sup>iv</sup>. What's needed is not additional policy, but effective and coordinated implementation of these progressive strategies with a focus on equity and sustainability. This includes strong leadership from government, clear and consistent coordination between ministries, and additional, sustainable funding.

In order to meet the projected balanced budget by 2018, Ontario needs strategic implementation of priorities and policies that are proven to make a difference. As declared by the World Health Organization, an "effective school health programme can be one of the most cost effective investments a nation can make to simultaneously improve education and health."<sup>v</sup> Ophea asks the government of Ontario to look to leverage the assets it has available to enable kids - one of our most vulnerable populations - to build the skills and knowledge to make healthy choices.

The government of Ontario should invest \$2 per child in new funds to secure the effective implementation of the Health and Physical Education (H&PE) curriculum and Healthy Schools. The H&PE curriculum is the largest single health promotion tool this province possesses and has the potential to positively impact more than 2,000,000 students, their families, and communities. This impact is all the more significant when school communities take a "Healthy Schools" approach, embedding health promotion across curriculum subjects and extra-curricular activities. We learned from the 2016 Budget Consultations that Ontarians are asking the province to "ensure that teachers are prepared to teach with confidence and efficiency right from the start", which is especially true for H&PE given the new curriculum.<sup>vi</sup> This means that the province needs to guarantee that professional learning is in place to support H&PE educators and those promoting student well-being. Moreover, an investment needs to be made to ensure that there is ongoing monitoring and quality assurance to help shape well-being in schools in the future.

Healthier students mean a healthier Ontario. Many of the leading causes of death, disease, and disability can be prevented or significantly reduced through effective school health programs.<sup>vii</sup> Schools are natural, effective, and economic intervention points and act as influential community hubs. Investing in not just student health, but school community health, means everyone benefits and coordination between all stakeholders is key, including educators, parents, public health, and community partners.

Ophea is a not-for-profit organization that champions healthy, active living in schools and communities through quality programs and services, partnerships, and advocacy, and is led by the vision that all children and youth value and enjoy the lifelong benefits of healthy, active living.

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<sup>i</sup> ParticipACTION. (2016). *Are Canadian Kids Too Tired To Move? The ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth*. Retrieved December 8, 2016 from <https://www.participation.com/sites/default/files/downloads/2016-06-16%20EN%20Highlight%20-%20FINAL%20DESIGN%20-%20singles.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance. (2016). *Determining Quality Chronic Disease Prevention Indicators for Ontario: The Chronic Disease Prevention Indicators Framework*. Retrieved December 8, 2016 from [http://ocdpa.ca/sites/default/files/publications/ADV\\_OCDPAIndicatorReportFINAL\\_18NV16\\_0.pdf](http://ocdpa.ca/sites/default/files/publications/ADV_OCDPAIndicatorReportFINAL_18NV16_0.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Canadian Mental Health Association. (n.d.) *Fast Facts About Mental Illness*. Retrieved December 8, 2016 from <http://www.cmha.ca/media/fast-facts-about-mental-illness/#.WE4X9IrlCs>

<sup>iv</sup> Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2015). *Detailed Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) Findings: Drug Use Among Ontario Students*. Retrieved December 8, 2016 from [http://www.camh.ca/en/research/news\\_and\\_publications/ontario-student-drug-use-and-health-survey/Documents/2015%20OSDUHS%20Documents/2015OSDUHS\\_Detailed\\_DrugUseReport.pdf](http://www.camh.ca/en/research/news_and_publications/ontario-student-drug-use-and-health-survey/Documents/2015%20OSDUHS%20Documents/2015OSDUHS_Detailed_DrugUseReport.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> World Health Organization. (n.d.) *School Health and Youth Health Promotion*. Retrieved on November 25, 2016 from [http://www.who.int/school\\_youth\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/en/)

<sup>vi</sup> Government of Ontario. (2016). *Pre-budget consultations: A review of what we heard from the public during the 2016 Budget Talks consultation*. Retrieved on November 25, 2016 from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/pre-budget-consultations>

<sup>vii</sup> Stewart-Brown, S. (2006). *What is the evidence on school health promotion in improving health or preventing disease and, specifically, what is the effectiveness of the health promoting schools approach?* Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe. Retrieved from: [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/74653/E88185.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/74653/E88185.pdf)