

The state of health of Ontario's children and youth has reached a critical point. If current levels of child and youth obesity continue, today's youth are looking at a shorter life expectancy than their parents for the first time in generations.ⁱ Almost one in three children has an unhealthy weight, with boys and aboriginal children disproportionately higher.ⁱⁱ Substance use and misuse are a real concern. Students as young as 12 are reporting being drunk at school; half of grade 7 - 12 students have admitted drinking alcohol and 17% have reported a potential drug use problem.ⁱⁱⁱ Bullying and poor mental health are threatening realities, with 10% of students admitting to having seriously considered suicide.^{iv} Even physical activity as a fun part of childhood is on the decline, with only 5% of children and youth getting the recommended 60 minutes of moderate-vigorous activity a day.^v The well-being of Ontario's kids is at stake.

Ontario is facing an impending health care system crisis. The signs are clearly evident - 1 in 3 Ontarians is affected by chronic disease, with chronic disease leading to nearly 90% of deaths in the country.^{vi} By 2030, if trends continue, health expenditures will make up 80% of the provincial program spending budget.^{vii} Every dollar spent to promote healthy eating and physical activity saves \$6 in the cost of caring for people with chronic diseases.^{viii} An economically sustainable and comprehensive approach that protects Ontario residents' health and Ontario's economic future needs to be implemented. Financially, it makes sense.

Schools are a natural, effective and economic intervention point. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "an effective school health program can be one of the most cost effective investments a nation can make to simultaneously improve education and health".^{ix} Moreover, many of the leading causes of death, disease and disability can be prevented or significantly reduced through effective school health programs.^x The Health and Physical Education (H&PE) curriculum is the largest health promotion tool this province possesses, however the curriculum is now painfully out of date and out of touch with the health needs of today's kids.

In the absence of an updated H&PE curriculum, collaborative provincial action can still be taken to support positive health and learning outcomes for Ontario's 2.1 million children and youth. This action provides a foundation for the province's goal of reducing childhood obesity by 20% by 2018^{xi} and propels Ontario's education system along the path from great to excellent. As such, Ophea is recommending a \$3,000,000 coordinated investment over 3 years in order to:

- increase support for educators who currently lack the foundational support of an updated H&PE curriculum, including additional resources, capacity building, and cross-sectoral collaboration
- increase support for the implementation and celebration of Healthy Schools

This investment amounts to only **\$0.48 per student per year**.

The health and well-being of every student in Ontario matters. There's no time to wait until the updated H&PE curriculum is released. Students need and a committed government ready to take a leadership role in their health now.

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.

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

ⁱ King, A. (2010). *2009 Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario: Public Health – Everyone’s Business*. Retrieved from http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/cmoh_09/cmoh_09.pdf

ⁱⁱ Ontario’s Healthy Kids Panel. (2013). *No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy*. Retrieved from http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/healthy_kids/healthy_kids.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2013). *Drug Use Among Ontario Students 1977-2013: Detailed OSDHUS Findings*. Retrieved from http://www.camh.ca/en/research/news_and_publications/ontario-student-drug-use-and-health-survey/Documents/2013%20OSDUHS%20Docs/2013OSDUHS_Detailed_DrugUseReport.pdf

^{iv} Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2011). *The Mental Health and Well-Being of Ontario Students 1991-2011: OSDHUS Highlights*. Retrieved from http://www.camh.ca/en/research/news_and_publications/ontario-student-drug-use-and-health-survey/Documents/2009%20OSDUHS%20Docs/Highlights_MHReport_2009OSDUHS_Final_Corrected.pdf

^v Active Healthy Kids Canada. (2013). *Are We Driving Our Kids to Unhealthy Habits? The Active Healthy Kids Canada 2013 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth*. Toronto: Active Healthy Kids Canada. Retrieved from http://dvqdas9jty7g6.cloudfront.net/reportcard2013/Active-Healthy-Kids-2013-Report-Card_en.pdf

^{vi} Ontario Health Quality Council. (2008). *2008 Report on Ontario’s Healthy System*. Retrieved from <http://www.hqontario.ca/portals/0/Documents/pr/qmonitor-full-report-2008-en.pdf>

^{vii} TD Economics. (2010). *Charting a Path to Sustainable Health Care in Ontario: 10 Proposals to Restrain Cost Growth without Compromising Quality of Care*. Retrieved from <http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/td-economics-special-db0510-health-care.pdf>

^{viii} Public Health Leadership Council. (2013) *Make No Little Plans: Ontario’s Public Health Sector Strategic Plan*. Retrieved from http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/make_no_little_plans/docs/make_no_little_plans.pdf

^{ix} World Health Organization. (n.d.) *School and Youth Health*. *World Health Organization*. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/en/

^x 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

^{xi} Ontario’s Healthy Kids Panel. (2013). *No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy*. Retrieved from http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/healthy_kids/healthy_kids.pdf