

# Ontario's Action Plan

## For Healthy Eating And Active Living



Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living  
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Dear Partners in Health Promotion,

I am extremely pleased to be able to present to you *Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living*. The Action Plan has been developed to support the McGuinty government's goal of creating a healthier province for all Ontarians.

In 2004, our Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Sheela Basrur, sounded the alarm in her report *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives*. The report highlighted a number of barriers that make it difficult for some friends, family, neighbours and colleagues in Ontario to achieve and maintain optimal health through nutritious eating and appropriate physical activity.

When the Ministry of Health Promotion was first created by Premier McGuinty - and given responsibility to respond to the CMOH's report - we recognized that there was a need for us to hear from Ontarians about what they were doing successfully in their communities and what support they needed from government to be even more effective.

Through a series of roundtable discussions, we heard about creative activities and innovative suggestions for promoting healthy eating and active living throughout the diverse communities that make up this province. This Action Plan incorporates and builds on many of those suggestions.

As Minister, and with the help of my Parliamentary Assistants Peter Fonseca and Dr. Shafiq Qaadri, it has been a gratifying experience to meet with so many partners who have helped to identify where best to focus the energies of the Ministry of Health Promotion. We have realized that our best opportunity to effect change will come from focusing on four areas – Growing a Generation of Healthy Children and Youth; Enabling Healthy Communities; Influencing Healthy Public Policy; and, Supporting Public Education and Engagement.

My thanks go to the many community and provincial partners who have influenced the development of this Plan. I hope you share my enthusiasm for it and my belief that it will be a catalyst for change, for healthy eating and active living, for helping attain the vision of Healthy Ontarians in a Healthy Ontario.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jim Watson'.

Jim Watson, MPP  
Ottawa West-Nepean  
Minister



# Working Together for a Healthier Ontario

Good health is a shared responsibility. The Ministry of Health Promotion's mandate is to improve, coordinate and fund programs that contribute to healthy and active living. Our complementary priorities – Smoke-Free Ontario, Healthy Eating and Active Living, *ACTIVE2010*, Injury Prevention and Mental Health Promotion – link to form a comprehensive approach to health promotion and chronic disease prevention.

During its first year, the ministry has taken action on many priorities and has achieved early success in its goal of creating a healthy Ontario. For example:

- By implementing the Smoke-Free Ontario strategy that will enable Ontarians to live smoke-free lives, we have already made huge strides toward creating and sustaining a healthier population.
- Our investments in *ACTIVE2010*: Ontario's Sport and Physical Activity Strategy are helping Ontarians to be more physically active. This includes the Communities in Action Fund that last year supported 187 community sport and physical activity projects. The launch of Ontario's Trails Strategy is enabling more Ontarians to enjoy the benefits of outdoor walking, while the Quest For Gold program supports Ontario's amateur athletes to realize their dreams of competition.
- Through local Public Health Units, we support a number of mandatory programs as well as 36 Ontario Heart Health community partnerships, which run comprehensive programs to reduce the risk of heart disease and other



chronic conditions. Our involvement helped mobilize more than 2,300 community partners across the province and generated local in-kind support in excess of the 2:1 target ratio.

Through these and other initiatives, we are developing a depth and breadth of knowledge and expertise, joining with partners in communities and across all levels of government to advance the health of our population.

Many organizations across the province are actively involved in health promotion and are eager to work together. For example:

- Partner ministries across the Government of Ontario are supporting healthy and active living through policies and initiatives, including increasing physical activity in schools, improving access to nutritious food for our children and youth and promoting healthier workplaces and a clean and safe environment.
- Community organizations are providing education programs that promote healthy eating, physical activity and sport participation and support people at risk of diabetes, heart disease and other chronic illness to change their diet and be more active.
- Some private sector companies, including large industries, are developing workplace wellness programs and promoting healthy food choices and physical activity. Parts of the food industry are offering healthier food choices and raising consumer awareness of these options.

By working together, we can have a greater impact. As a champion for health promotion, the ministry will harness the energy of its



partners to coordinate the delivery of complementary, effective programs and to develop stronger, more consistent health promotion messages.

Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living is part of a worldwide response to reduce chronic disease by targeting nutrition and physical activity. In 2004, The World Health Assembly endorsed a strategy to address these preventable risk factors<sup>1</sup>, and work is continuing in Canada on an Integrated Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy<sup>2</sup>. A review of international research and a scan of healthy living strategies in other Canadian jurisdictions informed the development of Ontario's Plan, ensuring that Ontario's approach is well aligned to support a healthy nation.

### **Our Vision**

Healthy Ontarians, Healthy Ontario

### **Our Mission**

- Champion health promotion in Ontario and inspire individuals, organizations, communities and governments to create a culture of health and well-being.
- Provide programs, services and incentives that will enhance health and well-being.
- Make healthy choices easier.
- Harness the energy and commitment of other Government of Ontario ministries, other levels of government, community partners, the private sector, the media and the public to promote health and well-being for all Ontarians.
- Make Ontario a leader in health promotion within Canada and internationally.

## **About the Ministry of Health Promotion**

The Ministry of Health Promotion is a leader for healthy, active living across government and across the province. We are committed to a population health approach that supports a healthier Ontario by:

- Promoting health at each age and stage of life, focusing first on children and youth;
- Influencing the determinants of health – the social and economic factors that shape our health;
- Engaging partners to share the responsibility for a healthier Ontario; and
- Improving the health of those most at risk and removing barriers to healthy, active living so that Ontarians have greater opportunities to enjoy good health.

We are building on effective programs and services and using a variety of approaches – including education, policies, capacity building and collaboration among partners – to enable Ontarians to live healthy and active lives. By focusing on the broad determinants of health, or those factors that shape our health, we have a much greater opportunity to reduce barriers and improve health for all Ontarians where they live, work, learn and play.

### **Our Action Plan:**

- Responds to our challenge to create a healthier province for all Ontarians, including those who are most at risk;
- Builds on a foundation of strategies and programs already underway;
- Defines strategic directions and launches a set of investments and activities that lay the ground work for future initiatives; and
- Is a catalyst and a call to action to our partners to take collective action to remove barriers and coordinate efforts to promote healthy eating and active living.

# Our Challenge for a Healthier Ontario

## Why are Healthy Eating and Active Living Important?

Healthy eating and active living can help create a healthier Ontario. Healthy eating and regular physical activity are essential for health and well-being. People who eat nutritious foods and are physically active are more likely to lead longer, healthier lives:

- Children and youth who eat fruits and vegetables at least five times a day are less likely to be overweight<sup>3</sup>, and those who participate in team sports have higher averages in school and are more likely to graduate from post-secondary education<sup>4</sup>.
- Diet, physical activity and maintenance of appropriate body weight can prevent between 30% to 40% of all cases of cancer<sup>5</sup>, and about 50% of all cancer deaths are related to tobacco use, diet and physical activity<sup>6</sup>.
- Researchers suggest that 90% of type 2 diabetes and 80% of coronary heart disease could be avoided by maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, eating healthy foods, avoiding smoking and drinking moderately<sup>7</sup>.
- Obesity costs Ontario approximately \$1.6 billion annually, including \$647 million in direct costs and \$905 million in indirect costs<sup>8</sup>.



- Physical activity helps to reduce the risk of falls and fractures, and prevents further bone loss from osteoporosis<sup>9</sup>.
- While estimates show that the number of Canadians in their 60s will increase by 50% over the next 10 years, a recent study indicates that 52% of Canadian baby boomers are inactive, with rates of obesity among this generation increasing by nearly 60% in the last decade<sup>10</sup>.
- For seniors – even seniors with chronic health conditions – good health is associated with being physically active three or more times a week, being a healthy weight and eating fruits and vegetables at least five times a day<sup>11</sup>.

Healthy people use fewer health care services. Right now, Ontario spends almost half of its provincial budget on the health – or illness – care system. A healthier population could save us billions every year in health care costs. Good health drives economic growth, which helps create a prosperous province that can compete in global markets.

We know that healthy eating and physical activity can lead to improved health throughout an individual's life span. While most Ontarians believe that health is a personal responsibility, there is a large gap between what we know and what we do. Challenges to healthy eating and active living can often be difficult for individuals to overcome on their own. And, while some individuals can make immediate changes to improve their health, it can take several years to improve the health of a community or population.



## Ontario's Diversity

For Ontario's richly diverse population, being healthy and active means different things to different people. For example, each culture has food customs and traditions that must be part of our healthy eating initiatives. When it comes to physical activity, people have different abilities, and different needs at each age and stage of life. The type of information, education and support we need changes across our life span.

Aboriginal people in Ontario face serious health challenges. Compared to the general population, Aboriginal people are more likely to develop heart disease and diabetes. In fact, rates of diabetes are three to five times higher among Aboriginal peoples than in non-Aboriginal communities<sup>12</sup>. The health gap for Aboriginal communities is affected by a mix of complex factors, including access to healthy foods.

Newcomers to Canada also face health risks. Once in Ontario, some people face the stress of adjusting to a new life and, sometimes, a new diet. Newcomers are also less likely to be physically active than people who have been in Canada longer<sup>13</sup>. Language, literacy, income and cultural differences may prevent some newcomers from getting the information, healthy food, opportunities for physical activity and social support they need to improve or maintain their health.

## An Epidemic of Unhealthy Weights

The Chief Medical Officer of Health's 2004 annual report – *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives* – sounded the alarm about the growing epidemic of unhealthy weights in the province.

According to the Chief Medical Officer of Health's report, we are now living in environments, communities, workplaces, schools and homes that actually promote or encourage obesity:

- Many young people do not have the opportunity to be physically active every day and are surrounded by ads promoting soft drinks and snack foods.
- More adults work in sedentary jobs and drive long distances to work.
- 'Super-sized' food portions are the norm.
- More communities lack sidewalks, park space, bike lanes and recreation programs<sup>14</sup>.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health also highlighted barriers that make it difficult for some groups of Ontarians to maintain a healthy weight:

- Some people do not have enough income to make healthy food choices.
- Children and youth from low income families are less likely to participate in organized sport or be physically active.
- Children and youth who are new to Canada are less physically active.



- The rates of obesity among Aboriginal people are nearly twice the overall rate for Canadian adults, and this is accompanied by high rates of type 2 diabetes in Aboriginal communities in Canada.
- Obesity is higher in more rural and remote areas, like Northern Ontario<sup>15</sup>.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health report urged Ontario to “act now to create communities that promote healthy eating and regular physical activity.”

## Learning From Ontario’s Diverse Communities

We wanted to learn first-hand about what our communities are facing and the creative and innovative actions that are making a difference. In early 2006, a series of roundtable discussions was held in 11 communities across the province. We learned from community organizations that Ontarians are working hard to promote active living and healthy eating in their communities, and while there are many success stories, they are also facing a number of barriers.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health called on “all levels of government, the health sector, the food industry, workplaces, schools, families and individuals to become part of a comprehensive province-wide effort to change all the factors that contribute to unhealthy weight.”

### **Recommendations for the Government of Ontario:**

- Develop an innovative, comprehensive, multi-sectoral plan to address healthy weights in partnership with other ministries.
- Develop a targeted, strategic, well-resourced mass media campaign.
- Develop policies and programs that promote healthy eating and physical activity.
- Conduct ongoing, province-wide monitoring for chronic disease risk factors and use this information to inform policy and programs.
- Partner with the private sector to highlight successful private sector initiatives to promote healthy eating and regular physical activity.





According to more than 1,000 people who participated in the roundtables, the main challenges to good health are the broader factors that limit Ontarians' ability to make healthy choices, including:

- Lack of recreation facilities, bike paths and sidewalks in many communities;
- Urban planning and land-use practices that create communities where people have to use their cars to get to stores, work and school;
- Lack of healthy public policy to support healthy eating and active living;
- Low incomes which affect people's ability to buy healthy food or pay to participate in recreation programs;
- The high cost of fresh fruits and vegetables – particularly in northern and remote communities – and the high cost of sport and recreation programs in some communities;
- Lack of awareness about facilities in the community that can be used for recreation.

**Roundtables were held in:**

- Ottawa
- London
- Toronto
- Scarborough
- Barrie
- Sault Ste. Marie
- Thunder Bay
- Windsor
- Mississauga
- North Bay
- Kingston

We also learned that there is a need for provincial coordination to share or replicate “promising practices” with other communities, to evaluate those practices, and to help build the capacity of all communities to create and sustain policies and programs that support healthy and active living.

Ontario's communities echoed the views of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and called on the provincial government to build on effective programs already in place, to coordinate health promotion efforts and reduce duplication, to address gaps and to promote a strong message of healthy eating and active living across the province.

# Responding to Our Challenge

## Our Approach

We have learned – from literature and research, the Chief Medical Officer of Health’s report and by listening to communities – that a comprehensive, phased approach is required with particular attention being focused in each of the following areas:

### Children and Youth

Healthy eating and physical activity are key factors in child development. Habits and attitudes developed in childhood last a lifetime. People who eat healthy foods and are physically active during their childhood and youth are more likely to eat nutritious food and be active throughout their lives. By supporting healthy children and youth, we can also impact the choices that parents and caregivers make, so that families can lead healthier lives. Our efforts to support healthy and active children and youth will help grow a generation of healthier Ontarians and build a culture of health and well-being throughout the province.

### Enabling Communities and Environments

Ontarians live, work, learn and play in environments – workplaces, schools, homes, neighbourhoods – that can make it difficult to eat nutritious foods and be physically active. Coordinated, collaborative action by communities, the private sector, individuals and government is required to develop environments for people of all ages that enable easier access to



resources, information and programs, and to address barriers in communities that are most in need.

### Healthy Public Policy

Our ability to make healthy food choices and be physically active is shaped by a wide range of social and economic factors. The policies and programs developed by governments, agencies, community organizations and the private sector can influence these factors. We have an opportunity to impact a range of health determinants when we take an evidence-based approach, engage a range of sectors and coordinate our efforts to develop policies and programs that support a healthy Ontario.

### Education and Engagement

Evidence suggests that we can be most successful in changing attitudes and behaviours when we use a range of approaches, including community education and public awareness<sup>16</sup>. Public education and awareness campaigns are an essential part of health promotion strategies. They help reinforce the importance of healthy choices and support community efforts to promote healthy and active living. By engaging communities and organizations, including the private sector, in our vision for a healthy Ontario, we can empower Ontarians to take individual and collective action to create a healthier culture.



## Ontario's Action Plan For Healthy Eating And Active Living

The Action Plan supports the government's broad commitment to a healthy Ontario and builds on a foundation of services that support the health of families and communities. This Plan proposes collective action on the challenges identified by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and communities across Ontario.

The Ministry of Health Promotion is starting by launching a range of investments and activities and working collaboratively with our partners

in communities, government and the private sector, including the food industry, to develop a culture of healthy living.

Building on our existing programs and services, the ministry is committed to the following four key strategies to make healthy eating and active living easier for all Ontarians where they live, work, learn and play:

- A. Grow healthy children and youth**
- B. Build healthy communities**
- C. Champion healthy public policy**
- D. Promote public awareness and engagement**



## A. Grow Healthy Children and Youth



### The Compelling Facts

- In 2004, 28% of Ontario children and youth aged 2 to 17 were overweight or obese<sup>17</sup>.
- In 2002, more than half of Canadian children and youth aged 15 to 19 were not active enough for optimal growth and development<sup>18</sup>.
- In 2004, the 59% of Canadian children and youth aged 2 to 17 who consumed fruits and vegetables less than 5 times a day were significantly more likely to be overweight or obese than those who ate fruits and vegetables more frequently<sup>19</sup>.

### Building on Our Foundation

The Ministry of Health Promotion invests a significant portion of its resources in a range of programs that support the health of children and youth.

Child health programs provided by Public Health Units include activities that promote nutrition for pregnant women, support breastfeeding and provide opportunities for parents to learn about the importance of healthy eating, physical activity and supportive environments for their child's development.

As part of *ACTIVE2010*, the ministry also funds the Communities in Action Fund to enable increased participation in community sport and physical activity. Through this fund we support community organizations that help address barriers to participation, with an emphasis on improving access for children and youth, including those that are most at risk. For example, we supported the establishment of basketball leagues, aerobic classes and other exercise programs for almost 400 Somali youth and their parents in Toronto. These efforts, along with other government initiatives, contribute to building healthy foundations for Ontario's children and youth.

### Other Ways Government is Helping to Grow Healthy Children and Youth:

- The Ministry of Education has introduced Daily Physical Activity as a mandatory component of the elementary curriculum, requiring a minimum of 20 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each school day during instructional time.
- The Ministry of Education has also released recommended nutrition standards for foods and beverages in elementary school vending machines.
- The Ministry of Children and Youth Services provides funding for the student nutrition program - a grant program operated by local organizations that provides healthy meals and snacks to 270,000 elementary and secondary students during the school day. The ministry's contribution helps to leverage funding from other sources including parents, volunteers, corporate sponsors and municipalities.



## Our Action Plan

To build on the programs already in place and address critical gaps, the Ministry of Health Promotion is moving forward on 14 initiatives:

- 1. Improve Access to Healthy Food for Young People.** To overcome some of the barriers children in Northern Ontario communities face in accessing fruit and vegetables, the ministry will launch a Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Project. Working closely with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and local school boards, we will provide children with fruits and vegetables at pilot schools in Northern Ontario, with an emphasis on Ontario grown produce.
- 2. Support Healthy Schools.** Many schools across Ontario are already promoting healthy eating and physical activity. We want to recognize schools for their efforts, encourage them to keep up the good work and be a role model for others. With the Ministry of Education, we will launch the **Healthy School Recognition Program**. We are working with the Ministry of Education to develop a joint strategy to support healthy eating and active living in schools.
- 3. Promote Active and Safe Routes to School.** To increase opportunities for kids to be physically active each day, we will provide additional resources to community organizations to develop active, safe routes to school that make it easier for

kids to walk or bike to school, instead of being driven.

#### 4. Make it Easier for Children and Youth to be Healthy and Active.

The ministry will continuously identify opportunities to make it easier for children and youth, including those that are most in need, to access healthy foods and to be physically active.

For example, in 2005/06 the WinterACTIVE program provided an opportunity for children and youth in communities most in need to participate in a variety of recreational programs across Ontario. We also made a supplemental investment in the Communities in Action Fund and provided grants for 22 additional physical activity, sport and healthy living projects targeted to reach children and youth in at-risk communities.

### Partnerships are Helping to Grow Healthy Children and Youth

- A Community Health Centre in Toronto is using its rooftop garden to teach children about composting, the food cycle, growing vegetables and healthy eating. The program also incorporates physical activity to help children adopt healthy and active behaviours from the early years.
- The Community Nutrition Partnership Program is an example of sectors working together. The Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers, the Ontario Student Nutrition Program and Jumpstart, a coalition of community partners, provided fresh vegetables as a morning snack to 4 elementary and one secondary school in the Windsor-Essex County area. As a result, 80% of elementary students said that they are now eating more vegetables since the start of the program.



## B. Build Healthy Communities

### The Compelling Facts

- In 2004, almost 60% of adults in Ontario were overweight or obese<sup>20</sup>.
- In a 2001 report, 28% of Ontarians reported that the lack of pleasant places to walk or bicycle was a barrier to them being more active<sup>21</sup>.
- Our communities are designed in ways to make it easier to drive than to walk, and that is a threat to our health: each hour per day spent in a car increases the likelihood of being obese by 6%<sup>22</sup>.
- The health status of Aboriginal peoples is worse than that of other Canadians on all measures, including life expectancy, infant mortality, smoking, obesity and suicide<sup>23</sup>.

### Building on Our Foundation

The Ministry of Health Promotion already supports a number of programs that are building healthy communities across Ontario.

*ACTIVE2010:* Ontario's Sport and Physical Activity Strategy includes a number of key components, including the Ontario Trails Strategy, which supports convenient, affordable and health-enhancing physical activity on Ontario's province-wide network of trails, such as walking, hiking, jogging, rollerblading, cross-country skiing, cycling and other activi-

ties. The ministry supports the Ontario Aboriginal Sport Circle, which provides leadership for the development of Aboriginal athletes, sport and recreation leaders and coaches to help increase participation in sport and physical activity for Aboriginal people in the province.

Local Public Health Units have developed extensive partnerships and networks to support healthy eating and active living programs at the community level. Chronic Disease Prevention Programs promote healthy eating and physical activity, as well as prevent chronic disease risk factors, in schools, workplaces and other community settings. The Ontario Heart Health Programs mobilize communities through partnerships to target the three risk factors for heart disease – tobacco use, unhealthy eating and physical inactivity.

### Our Action Plan

To enhance existing efforts to build healthy communities, the ministry will:

#### 5. Help Ontarians Access Dietitians.

We will improve access to timely and reliable nutrition information for families and health care providers by establishing a web- and phone-based province-wide dietitian advisory service. This service will be particularly important for people in remote areas who may not have easy access to a registered dietitian.

#### 6. Promote and Expand the Eat Smart!

**Program.** We will work with companies, communities and recreation centres across



the province to promote Eat Smart!, a voluntary program that establishes criteria and recognizes cafeterias and restaurants that provide healthy food choices.

**7. Work with Aboriginal Communities to develop Healthy Eating and Active Living Programs.** We are working with Aboriginal communities to build a foundation of support and culturally appropriate programs that will begin to address the complex barriers to healthy eating and active living facing Aboriginal people in Ontario. For example, in 2005/06 we worked with the 49 Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities to provide recreation and fitness equipment and train 80 health and fitness ambassadors, including 60 youth.

**8. Promote Healthy Urban Design.** To raise awareness of how urban design and the built environment affect health, we will work with our partners responsible for

municipal design and growth planning, including the Ministries of Public Infrastructure Renewal and Municipal Affairs and Housing, to support the implementation of initiatives such as the Growth Plan and the Greenbelt Plan. We will hold a series of Active Transportation and Urban Design Forums for community planners, engineers, designers and other professionals where participants will share best practices on how to implement healthy urban design and build communities that enable Ontarians to live healthy, active lives.

### **Partnerships are Helping to Build Healthy Communities**

- Parry Sound organized a “No TV” challenge that encouraged residents to “turn off the TV, grab a healthy snack and get active.”
- Some private sector organizations are contributing to healthy communities by developing workplace wellness programs, providing opportunities for employees to be physically active and ensuring that cafeterias offer healthy food choices.
- Street Hockey “For More” is a summer youth ball-hockey program for children aged 5-12 in four low-income Toronto neighbourhoods. The program provides access to equipment and local leaders and introduces boys and girls to Canada's hockey culture through participation.

### **Other ways Government is Supporting Healthy Communities:**

- The Community Use of Schools program, led by the Ministry of Education in partnership with the Ministry of Health Promotion, has reduced fees for community groups to use school facilities for recreational purposes.
- The Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe provides a clear and coherent plan to support the creation of complete and livable communities where people are close to jobs, shops and parks.
- Through its Greenbelt Plan, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has protected 1.8 million acres of greenspace, including trails and parks, which will help ensure clean air and safe water. Reforms to Ontario's land-use planning system will also help create more pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods.
- The Ministry of the Environment is helping to build healthy communities by leading initiatives to protect the environment, including the Five-Point Plan for Cleaner Air and the introduction of the Clean Water Act.



## C. Champion Healthy Public Policy

### The Compelling Facts

- Some organizations, communities and individuals may not be fully aware of the linkages between the factors that shape our health (e.g. education, the physical environment, social support networks, employment) and health outcomes.
- Some organizations are developing policies and programs that influence the factors that shape health – not-for-profit organizations, municipalities, community groups and government ministries – but may work in isolation from one another.

### Building on Our Foundation

The Ministry of Health Promotion is actively developing and influencing healthy public policy in Ontario.

We have developed a structure to link Cabinet Ministers charged with mandates that support healthy and active living. This forum enables ministries to identify opportunities to align complementary efforts to promote health. Through this mechanism and others, we are working across government to build a common foundation for health promotion, influence the development of healthy public policy and improve the coordination of policies and programs that contribute to improving the health and well-being of Ontarians.

Our ministry and the Ministry of Labour are co-leading the Forum for the Advancement of Healthy Workplaces. This group of leaders from the private sector, industry, communities and government is working together to identify opportunities to build workplaces that support healthy living.

The Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation agreed at their conference in Regina in August 2005 that sport and recreation infrastructure was their number one priority, recognizing that infrastructure needs are unique to each jurisdiction. Ministers recognized the direct connection between physical activity, sport participation and healthy communities through the provision of and access to sport and recreation infrastructure. Ontario's participation in this federal-provincial-territorial initiative is critical to supporting the national sport and recreation infrastructure agenda, and to achieving our vision for a healthier, more active province.

### Another way Government is Supporting Healthy Public Policy:

- The Best Start Plan is a comprehensive strategy involving a major redesign of services in terms of how children and families are supported from birth through to grade one. The goal of Best Start is that children in Ontario will be ready and eager to achieve success in school by the time they start grade one.





## Our Action Plan

To influence the development of healthy public policy our plan will:

- 9. Build Partnerships for Change.** We will continue to establish and influence public policies that support healthy eating and active living in key settings, including workplace wellness, school health, active transportation and enabling communities. We will sustain the momentum for change by developing partnerships with other levels of government as well as the private sector, including the food and restaurant industry.

Our recent province-wide roundtable initiative is an important example of how we are engaging and mobilizing communities to build and champion healthy public policy together.

**10. Foster Learning and Innovation.**

We will bring together government, community, international and private sector leaders through a conference to profile achievements and identify opportunities to work collaboratively towards a healthier Ontario.

- 11. Invest in Results.** To better understand what people and communities need to be healthy and active, we will monitor our programs to measure and evaluate the impacts of our strategy. We will develop policies and programs based on credible, reliable data to ensure we are making a significant and sustained impact in addressing a wide range of physical activity and nutrition concerns.

## Leveraging Public Policy for a Healthy Ontario

- The federal government is making it easier for Canadians to quickly evaluate the nutritional contents of food. On December 12, 2005, Health Canada regulations made nutrition labeling mandatory on most foods, updated requirements for nutrient content claims and permitted diet-related health claims for foods.
- In 2004, through a collaborative partnership with the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, DaimlerChrysler Canada and the Canadian Auto Workers received the National Quality Institute's Healthy Workplace Gold Trophy. This distinction was awarded based on evaluation of their wellness programs against criteria developed by NQI in partnership with Health Canada and health professionals to assess overall effectiveness in relation to environmental, physical, mental, safety and social issues<sup>24</sup>.
- At the Regina 2005 meeting, federal, provincial and territorial Ministers identified sport and recreation infrastructure as a national priority. Parameters are being developed for a long-term program dedicated to sport and recreation infrastructure based on information shared between jurisdictions.



## D. Promote Public Awareness and Engagement

### The Compelling Facts

- Including public education and marketing as part of a broad range of programs and services can support Ontarians in better understanding health risks and behaviours.
- For example, community-wide public education multi-media campaigns that targeted a large audience were part of a wider strategy of programs and services have been demonstrated to be effective at increasing physical activity<sup>25</sup>.
- The active engagement of individuals, communities and organizations in policy and program development is important in a modern, democratic society. Citizen participation helps foster greater transparency and accountability and improves the quality of decision-making because it includes a wider range of information sources and potential solutions<sup>26</sup>.

### Building on Our Foundation

We have learned about the importance of engagement and raising public awareness about the threats to our health from our successful approaches in the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy. For example, the award-winning stupid.ca website is engaging and educating youth about the effects of smoking.

The Ministry of Health Promotion currently invests in a number of key public awareness initiatives to help communities and individuals learn more about the benefits of healthy eating and active living. For example:

- The ministry supports HealthyOntario.com, a website that provides Ontarians with quick and easy access to health information, services, advice and practical ideas for healthier living. HealthyOntario.com receives over two million visits every year and offers thousands of pages of articles, assessment tools, medical information, healthcare services, and links to other health and wellness websites.
- Through the *ACTIVE2010* website, the ministry is providing information to children and adults about the benefits of physical activity, as well as tools and resources that encourage and enable participation.



- The ministry is exploring mass-media campaigns, both past and current, to identify effective ways that physical activity and healthy eating have been supported through public education and awareness. One good example that many adults in Ontario would remember is ParticipACTION, a campaign that provided helpful tips and tools for healthy and active living.

## Our Action Plan

To deliver compelling and consistent messages about the benefits of healthy eating, physical activity and sport participation – and to reduce duplication where possible – the Ministry of Health Promotion will work with its partners to:

- 12. Inform Parents, Caregivers and Professionals.** We will develop resources to assist families, caregivers and professionals in early learning and care settings and in schools to support healthy eating and physical activity starting in the early years. We will adapt and translate these resources so that they are appropriate for and accessible to Ontario's diverse communities. These resources also link with our dietitian advisory service that will provide easy access to nutrition information for parents and professionals.

- 13. Support Public Education and Marketing Campaigns.** Through a public education and marketing campaign, we will promote a culture of health and well-being in Ontario by raising awareness about the benefits of physical activity, sport participation, nutrition and energy balance.

- 14. Align Public Awareness Efforts.** To help change attitudes and behaviours, we will work with our partners in communities, including local public health units, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to enhance and coordinate messages that encourage healthy eating and active living. We will link communications messages with programs and services that enable individuals and communities to make healthy choices easier.

### Another way Government is Raising Awareness about Healthy Eating and Active Living:

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' Foodland Ontario program promotes the freshness, good taste and good quality associated with the excellent variety of Ontario fruits and vegetables.

## Partnerships are Promoting Public Awareness and Engagement

- The Ministry of Health Promotion supports the Ontario Public Health Association's Nutrition Resource Centre, which includes the Community Food Advisor Program. This program trains volunteers to provide reliable information and education on healthy eating. In 18 communities across Ontario, over 300 advisors promote safe and nutritious food selection, preparation and storage through presentations, displays, cooking programs and other activities.
- With the support of the Communities in Action Fund, the Peng You Taiji Quan Association and its community partners in Thunder Bay will host a four-day international conference in July 2006. The workshops and demonstrations, featuring the top six taiji masters in the world, are anticipated to attract over 1,500 participants. This project will also promote the martial art of taiji to remote Aboriginal communities through web casts and distance education.
- Toronto and Peel Public Health Units have designed "Your Kids Are Listening", a campaign that aims to increase parents' awareness about the role they play in promoting healthy eating, physical activity and self-esteem for their young children. The ads depict young children quoting things more commonly said by adults to emphasize that what parents say and do can affect their children.



## A Call to Action

Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living represents the first time that the province has integrated nutrition and physical activity in one strategy. It is a thoughtful response to the Chief Medical Officer of Health's call for an innovative plan to address the two key risk factors for chronic disease: poor nutrition and physical inactivity. It provides a unique opportunity to take a more comprehensive look at the range of factors that affect health and the inter-relationship between our eating habits and our activity levels.

The Action Plan also reinforces the fact that healthy eating and active living are about more than individual choices. They are affected by a number of factors, including:

- The policies of a wide range of government and community programs;
- The decisions that communities make when planning neighbourhoods; and
- The decisions employers make that impact workplace wellness.



Since its inception almost a year ago, the Ministry of Health Promotion has been a leader for change in Ontario: a symbol of a much stronger commitment to create a culture of health and well-being in Ontario. With this plan, we take the first steps to coordinate and strengthen healthy eating and active living initiatives already underway in the province. We are also launching some innovative activities designed to build on our strengths, fill gaps and ensure that health promotion messages have a greater impact.

We are focusing where there is the greatest need and the greatest potential for change by:

- **Growing healthy children and youth;**
- **Building healthy communities;**
- **Championing healthy public policy; and**
- **Promoting public awareness and engagement.**

We envision an Ontario in which:

- All communities, schools, homes and work-places across the province are working together to remove barriers to healthy eating and active living; and
- All Ontarians have greater opportunities to make healthy choices and enjoy healthy lives.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health's report called for action at all levels. This is the Government of Ontario's response – the start of bold, collective action. We hope it acts as a catalyst for change and that it inspires our partners to join this journey toward our vision for Healthy Ontarians in a Healthy Ontario.

With this plan, we call on all our partners – other ministries, other levels of government, community organizations, the private sector and individuals – to help make a difference in the lives of Ontarians.

# Footnotes

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