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Mr. Bill Fisch
Chair
York Regional Board of Health
17250 Yonge Street,
Newmarket ON L3Y 6Z1

TRANSMITTAL OF THE ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS, 2008

Dear Mr. Fisch:

I am pleased to transmit to you the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), 2008. I am publishing the OPHS as the guidelines for the provision of mandatory health programs and services to which every board of health shall comply. The OPHS are issued under my authority in section 7 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA)*. The OPHS also include 26 issue-specific Protocols which articulate further detail with respect to the operationalization of specific requirements in the OPHS.

The completion and publication of the OPHS is a significant milestone in public health renewal in Ontario and I would like to acknowledge the support and expert advice provided by the public health sector in their development. Their release reflects the achievement of a commitment made in Operation Health Protection and is the culmination of several years of work which could not have been accomplished without the support and guidance of the public health field. The OPHS reflect a vision for the delivery of mandatory public health programs and services which is intended to achieve provincial consistency where required while fostering local-level flexibility where appropriate.

The OPHS and Protocols, with the exception of the Safe Water Program Standard and Drinking Water Protocol, will come into force on January 1, 2009. As of that date, they will replace the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines, 1997 as the guidelines which direct board of health mandatory program and service planning, delivery and evaluation under the HPPA. The Safe Water Program Standard and the Drinking Water Protocol, as well as related statutory amendments with respect to the transfer of oversight of Small Drinking Water Systems, to my Ministry, will come into

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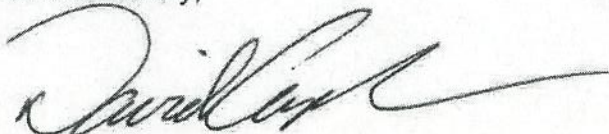
force on December 1, 2008. As of that date oversight of Small Drinking Water Systems becomes the responsibility of MOHLTC and boards of health, and public health inspectors will be expected to begin conducting individual site-specific risk assessments of Small Drinking Water Systems in the province.

To access the Ontario Public Health Standards and Protocols please visit the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website at www.health.gov.on.ca. The OPHS document and all 26 Protocols may be printed in full from the website. I would like to reassure you that I recognize the release of the new Standards as part of an iterative dialogue with the field which will include an "Evergreen" process which will be established to ensure that the new Standards and Protocols remain up-to-date, relevant and evidence-informed.

Over the coming weeks a number of activities are planned to accompany the release and "roll-out" of the OPHS which I hope you will find useful and informative. If you require further information regarding the Ontario Public Health Standards and Protocols please contact either Monika Turner, Director, Public Health Standards Branch at Monika.Turner@ontario.ca or by telephone at 416-327-7423 or Paulina Salamo, Manager, Program Standards Unit at Paulina.Salamo@ontario.ca or by telephone at 416-314-1019. If you require information related to Small Drinking Water Systems please contact Brenda Mitchell, Director, Environmental Health Branch, at Brenda.Mitchell@ontario.ca or by telephone at 416-327-7426 or Tony Amalfa, Manager, Environmental Health at Tony.Amalfa@ontario.ca or by telephone at 416-327-7624.

I am gratified that this important milestone in public health renewal and revitalization in Ontario has been achieved and look forward to continuing to work with you to protect the health of Ontarians.

Yours sincerely,



David Caplan
Minister

- c: Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health, York Region Public Health Services
Department
Peter Hume, President, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Joe Pennachetti, City Manager, City of Toronto
Dr. Vivek Goel, President, Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion
Hon. Margaret Best, Minister, Health Promotion
Hon. Deb Matthews, Minister, Children and Youth Services
Ron Sapsford, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health (A), Public Health Division
Allison Stuart, Assistant Deputy Minister (A), Public Health Division
Monika Turner, Director, Public Health Standards Branch
Brenda Mitchell, Director, Environmental Health Branch
Paulina Salamo, Manager, Program Standards Unit
Tony Amalfa, Manager, Environmental Health, Environmental Health Branch



Release of the Ontario Public Health Standards

Background Questions and Answers

Q: The Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) and Protocols are being released in late Fall 2008, when do they go into force?

A: The OPHS and Protocols, with the exception of the Safe Water Program Standard and the Drinking Water Protocol will go into force on January 1, 2009. As of January 1, 2009 the OPHS and Protocols will replace the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines, 1997 as the guidelines which direct board of health mandatory program and service planning, delivery and evaluation, under the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA). The Safe Water Program Standard and the Drinking Water Protocol will come into force on December 1, 2008. As of that date oversight of Small Drinking Water Systems becomes the responsibility of my Ministry, and boards of health.

Q: Are boards of health expected to adopt the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) and Protocols immediately, once they go into force?

A: Yes. Boards of health are expected to adopt the Safe Water Program Standard and Drinking Water Protocol as of December 1, 2008 and the remaining Standards and Protocols as of January 1, 2009.

The OPHS will be published by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care as the guidelines for mandatory programs and services under Section 7 of the HPPA. The Protocols are also issued under the Minister's authority through Section 7 (5) of the HPPA. Amendments to the HPPA were proclaimed on Sept. 30, 2008 - Section 7, subsections (5), (6) and (7) came into force. Subsection (5) allows for the adoption of other documents by reference, in a guideline. Subsection (6) specifies that a document incorporated by reference should be referred to as "amended from time to time" and subsection (7) states that a document comes into effect when MOHLTC notifies boards of health and when it publishes a notice.

The Safe Water Program Standard and the Drinking Water Protocol, as well as statutory amendments with respect to the transfer of oversight of Small Drinking Water Systems, to my Ministry, will come into force on December 1, 2008.

Q: In what way do the OPHS improve upon the Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines (MHPSG), 1997?

A: The review of the MHPSG was a key commitment under Operation Health Protection. The government has successfully developed new public health standards which are reflective of the current evidence and best practices in public health as well as emerging public health functions. The scope of the MHPSG review encompassed structural updates to incorporate a greater focus on performance, accountability and sustainability as well as technical updates.

The OPHS reflect the findings of key reports in public health and as a result reinforce the significance of population health assessment and surveillance, infectious disease prevention and management, and public health emergency preparedness as key functions for boards of health.

The OPHS and the 26 accompanying Protocols reflect a need for standardized practices where required as well as greater local flexibility to address population and other priorities at the local level.

Q: How was the public health sector involved in the development of the OPHS?

A: The OPHS and 26 accompanying Protocols were developed through ongoing consultation with the public health sector, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the City of Toronto, other provincial Ministries and broader healthcare sector stakeholders. A Technical Review Committee (consisting of representatives from boards of health (staff and management level), academia, AMO policy staff member, and government) and numerous writing teams of public health and government representatives were established to develop the OPHS and Protocols. In addition comprehensive consultation activities were undertaken with public health sector and other stakeholders at key milestones in the development of the OPHS and Protocols. The documents were revised and re-developed at specific junctures, based on detailed input from the field.

Q: How will the Ministry hold boards of health accountable for achieving the outcomes identified in the OPHS?

A: This is a key question for the public health sector. Work is underway toward the development of a performance management framework with a focus on outcomes rather than activity counting. This represents a paradigm shift. The focus is on performance at the outcome level to measure the impact of public health programs and services on Ontarians – that is changes in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, practices, environments, policies and programs and services to protect Ontarians from threats to their health.

We will be looking for future engagement and consultation opportunities on the development and refinement of the performance management framework, with the public health sector. We will be considering how to track and assess specific processes and outcomes identified in the OPHS within the overall Performance Management Framework.

Q: Will the Ministry be providing additional funds to support board of health adoption of the OPHS and Protocols?

A: The Ministry will not be providing additional funds beyond the Program Based Grants to boards of health to support implementation of the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) and Protocols.

Ministry staff were directed to develop the Standards and Protocols within the current fiscal envelope for public health and it is the government's expectation that boards of health will plan for their adoption within their current funding allocations for mandatory programs.

The government has met its commitment with respect to increasing its share for public health funding. Since 2004 we have progressively increased the provincial funding responsibility for mandatory programs to 75% - from 50% in 2004. As a result, municipalities have received financial relief of up to \$147.3 million (since 2004).

Q: The Ministry has stated that the OPHS and Protocols are “revenue neutral”. How has the revenue neutrality of the new Standards and Protocols been assessed?

A: There is no magic formula to assess the cost-neutrality however, the OPHS have been drafted to allow for provincial consistency where warranted as well as local flexibility to develop and adapt programs and services to meet local needs.

There is greater emphasis on population health assessment and surveillance as well as risk assessment to drive priority setting and program and service delivery, and less of an emphasis on counting activity “widgets”. For example, the Standards do not specify the required number of activities per thousand population with respect to the delivery of specific programs. They specify required outcomes and allow for a degree of flexibility in the achievement of those outcomes to appropriately address the specific populations and communities served.

There have been some additions, based on science, evidence and best practice as well as the removal of activities. In addition the Standards have been developed in close consultation with the field with an eye to the resource impacts of the required activities which they identify. Those proposed activities that were not deemed to be cost neutral (i.e., inclusion of a mental health promotion program standard and the provision of mouth guards) were not included in the final OPHS and Protocols.

Q: When will the Ministry address the remaining recommendations of the Capacity Review Committee with regard to the renewal of Ontario’s public health system?

A: The government has made significant progress in public health renewal and in responding to key recommendations of the Capacity Review Committee. We are continuing to consider the Committee’s recommendations in light of other public health renewal milestones which have been achieved, as well as others that are still under development.