

**Opening Address by the Honourable Minister of Health Promotion
at the
“Moving Upstream Together: Partnering For Ontario’s Future
Health and Well-Being” Conference
of the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse (OPC).**

[Full Text]

Good evening, everyone.

I am honoured to have this opportunity to open this year’s Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse conference, “Moving Upstream Together: Partnering For Ontario’s Future Health and Well-Being.”

Et je suis particulièrement heureux d’être ici ce soir pour célébrer le vingtième anniversaire de la création du Centre ontarien d’information en prévention.

And I am very pleased to be able to be here to help celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Clearinghouse.

I understand that your original focus was predominantly the development of a network of social service providers and community members to prevent mental health problems among families and children.

The fact that you have widened that scope, and that your original supporting ministries of Community and Social Services and Health supported this change, is an important recognition of the impact that the social determinants of health have on every aspect of our lives and the work that needs to be done in the prevention field.

Health promotion is a concept that is gaining popularity in nations around the world.

Just as it is your 20th anniversary, it is also the 20th anniversary of the Ottawa Charter that gave birth to the concept of Health Promotion, so we have much in common and much to celebrate.

The Ottawa Charter – as it was known – was the result of the determination of industrialized countries around the globe to focus on the public health of all citizens.

The charter encouraged countries to advocate a clear commitment among communities, health professionals, organizations and people to work together to contribute to the health and wellbeing of people everywhere. This includes Ontario.

Last year, Premier McGuinty took an unprecedented step in this province by creating a portfolio that is exclusively devoted to promoting the benefits of healthy Ontarians and a healthy Ontario.

The Ministry of Health Promotion has five key priorities.

They are:

- Creating a Smoke-Free Ontario
- Healthy Eating
- Active living, including competitive sports
- Injury prevention
- Mental health and addictions

We've already made tremendous strides in our efforts to create a smoke-free Ontario.

A little over one year ago, in December 2004, we introduced the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

This legislation will ban smoking in all enclosed workplaces and enclosed public places as of May 31, 2006.

It will also mean stronger measures to ensure that only those over the age of 19 can buy cigarettes in this province.

And it will phase out the display of tobacco products — with a complete ban taking effect May 31, 2008.

La stratégie antitabac de l'Ontario est sans conteste la plus musclée, la plus ambitieuse et la plus complète en Amérique du Nord.

The reasons are clear.

Tobacco is the number one killer and the number one cause of preventable death in this province.

Smoking costs Ontario \$4.3 billion each year — \$1.7 billion in health care costs and \$2.6 billion in lost productivity.

Smoking is responsible for 90 per cent of all lung cancer deaths in men and 80 per cent in women.

These are financial – and human – costs we simply cannot afford.

That's why Ontario is at the forefront of the most stringent anti-tobacco legislation on this continent.

Let me now turn to healthy eating and active living in Ontario.

Eating healthy, nutritious foods, and being physically active each day are important components of building and maintaining good health.

Our attention – over the next year or two – will be on children and youth.

Encouraging children to make healthy, active choices at an early stage in their lives will help them grow into healthy, active adults.

A healthier population means a healthier society and a stronger economy.

My priority is to encourage disease prevention through healthy, active living at the front-end of the health care system – so that there is reduced dependence on the more expensive back end.

Right now, for example, Ontario spends an incredible \$7 billion each year in hospital, drug and medical costs that are largely preventable.

En sensibilisant nos citoyens et en promouvant auprès d'eux des modes de vie sains et actifs, particulièrement pour nos enfants, nous pouvons faire un meilleur usage de l'argent alloué aux soins de santé et devenir les chefs de file du mieux-être.

In her report called *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives*,

Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Sheela Basrur, stated an alarming fact – Ontario faces an epidemic of obesity – especially among our children.

Because health promotion is essential to the mandate of public health, Dr. Sheela Basrur reports jointly to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Health Promotion.

In her report, Dr. Basrur indicated that between 1981 and 1996, the number of obese children in Canada between the ages of seven and 13 tripled.

This is contributing to an astonishing rise in illnesses such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, hypertension and some cancers.

These are serious diseases that are expensive to treat – and entirely preventable – among children and adults in this province.

And just last week, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, in its 2006 annual report on the health of Canadians, found that obesity rates among baby boomers have soared by nearly 60 per cent compared to 10 years ago.

About 52 per cent of baby boomers are inactive, and yet 80 per cent still think they will enjoy a longer life expectancy than previous generations.

Clearly, there is much work to do to increase awareness of the need for healthy foods and regular physical activity.

Notre stratégie pour des modes de vie sains et actifs s'attaquera de front à ce défi.

We expect to be able to introduce our strategy this year, with a plan to introduce new and innovative ways to combine healthy eating and regular physical exercise in this province.

Notre gouvernement veut voir grandir une génération d'enfants actifs et en santé, qui choisiront de passer plus de temps à s'amuser sur un terrain de baseball qu'à naviguer

sur Internet et qui préféreront manger une pomme qu'engloutir une frite format géant.

We recognize that changing attitudes, behaviours, environments and policies towards health and wellbeing is a challenge.

For this reason, our success will depend on building effective partnerships – with people, communities, organizations, all levels of government and the private sector – to create a culture of health and wellbeing in this province.

We believe that it is important to look at how communities are planned.

We believe it is important to work with the agriculture sector to ensure access to fresh produce throughout the province.

We believe in examining all of the determinants of health and ensuring that government policy is doing the job it intended as well as encouraging healthy living.

That is why I have been mandated by the Premier to form an Interministerial Committee with a number of my colleagues.

Certainly this initiative has received great support from those of you in the health promotion sector.

I'm very pleased to let you know that our Interministerial Committee is well underway and has the active engagement of the Minister's of Education, Children and Youth Services, Environment, Labour, Public Infrastructure, Health, Agriculture and others.

Through this forum we are developing the ability to look across all of our government departments and make every effort to have coordinated, complimentary efforts in our communities, schools, workplaces and throughout Ontario.

So, I thank you and you colleagues for the supportive nods and the endorsement of the need for this component of my work.

As a government, our vision is a province where families and communities work together to help make Ontario a healthy, prosperous place to live, work, play, learn and visit.

To help us reach our vision, we will rely on four principles:

- Education
- Engagement
- Empowerment
- Action

Education is key to healthy lives and communities because the more people, organizations and communities understand about the factors that affect our health, the more likely they are to take steps to improve health.

Engagement is all about shared responsibility for good health. Everyone in Ontario, regardless of age, gender, physical ability, culture, language or geography should have the opportunity to achieve good health.

Empowerment is about supporting Ontarians and their communities in their efforts to get healthy. Our research indicates Ontarians believe they are responsible for their own health and need the support of their communities to become and stay healthy.

To support the people of this province in their efforts to lead healthy and active lives, the Ministry of Health Promotion will work with stakeholders to provide education and influence the development of healthy public policy, so that we can help individuals and communities become healthier and stronger.

Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse is a great example of how effective partnerships can be.

With 20 years of leadership in the field of health promotion, you are clearly experts in your field.

And clearly adept at recognizing – at very early stages – how important it is to keep our children, families and communities healthy.

I look forward to learning from you and working with you to create a culture of health and wellbeing in Ontario.

Notre gouvernement partage vos préoccupations quant à l'importance de la promotion de la santé et de la prévention.

I know – as you do – the challenges we face, as we tackle effective ways to promote health among the people of Ontario.

At the end of the day, a healthier population with a reduced burden on our health care system makes our work a wise investment.

Thank you.