

Background/Preamble

The Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (OCDPA) is the collective voice on chronic disease prevention within this province. We are a collaborative of leading health-related organizations working together to focus on healthy living for Ontario in a comprehensive manner. The OCDPA believes that it is essential in Ontario for community and health practitioners, groups and organizations whose work relates to chronic disease and its prevention *to think, and act, like a system* in order to address prevention and reduce the burden of chronic disease in this province.

The Need for Messaging

Chronic disease accounts for a significant proportion of disability, death and health inequity world-wide, much of which is preventable¹. Currently, one in four Ontarians suffers from cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, depression or another chronic condition. However, two-thirds of Ontarians have at least one preventable risk factor for developing these chronic diseases in future². An estimated 80% of heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes, and 40% of cancers, could be avoided if shared risk factors were eliminated³. Increasingly, evidence supports that the global and social conditions in which people live significantly contribute to the incidence – or lack of incidence -- of chronic disease⁴. Attention must be focused on ways community and health practitioners, groups and organizations *can coordinate and work together* to prevent chronic disease and reduce Ontarians risks, in future.

Through its membership, the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance has identified the following “messages” to focus attention on the most important issues and priorities in chronic disease prevention and to promote collective action on these issues across Ontario. In order to have a real impact, these messages require attention from Alliance members and from all practitioners, groups and organizations working across Ontario in health and long-term care, health promotion, chronic disease prevention, community and social services with an interest in addressing the epidemic of chronic disease.

Our Messaging Approach

The messages take a “socio-environmental approach⁵” to preventing chronic disease, and are framed around the central themes of “access⁶ and availability⁷” to encourage the promotion of healthy eating, physical activity and mental health and the prevention of tobacco use and harmful use of alcohol. We challenge everyone to shift their focus towards the conditions which create health and influence chronic disease and away from the traditional focus on individual lifestyles and behaviours.

What the Messages Say

In an effort to encourage greater focus on the promotion of health and the prevention of chronic disease, the messages provide focal points to address either broader chronic disease prevention or risk factor specific issues. The messages focus on key policies and environmental supports required to address chronic disease and its risk factors. Each message provides examples and recommendations, based on best evidence, of actions that can be taken to support healthier living conditions. We encourage community and health practitioners,

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groups and organizations whose work related to chronic disease prevention to take a *multi-risk factor approach, across the lifespan, in multiple settings, promoting healthier living conditions* within their work and practices and recognizing that any strategy must *address the social determinants of health*.

How to Use the Messages

It is the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance's hope that a wide range of individuals, groups and organizations will adopt these messages in their work to promote healthy public policies. Our goal is that government at all levels will take appropriate action to improve living conditions that influence chronic disease in Ontario. We believe that a variety of individuals, groups and organizations, *working in parallel to advance these common priorities*, will be the most effective way to bring about the needed changes to support the health of our communities and populations across Ontario.

Feedback and Follow-up on the Messages

The OCDPA is interested in receiving feedback on the usage of these messages in the field. We encourage you to contact us at ocdpa@opha.on.ca and to visit our website, www.ocdpa.on.ca

Other Information

The Alliance has identified resources that may be helpful in taking action on these messages.

- Organizations and communities can apply for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario's [Community Advocacy Fund](#). This fund provides financial support to advocate for increased opportunities for physical activity and/or access to healthy food for children living across Ontario
- The [Ontario Trillium Foundation](#) supports local, regional and provincial work and activities related to their priorities: enhanced success for students and learners; healthier and more physically active Ontarians; enhanced employment and economic potential for workers and their families; more effective volunteers and more people engaged in their communities.
- Organizations can partner together and apply for OMAFRA's Ontario Market Investment Fund (OMIF). The [Ontario Market Investment Fund](#) can improve consumer access to locally produced foods by supporting local food network marketing and coordination efforts.
- Individuals can contact their local Ontario Heart Health Program – Taking Action on Healthy Living to learn more about local CDP activities and resources. A list of local Heart Health Coordinators can be found on the [Heart Health Resource Centre website](#).
- The [Ontario Health Promotion Resource System](#) is a network of resource centres that support Ontario health promoters by providing training, consultation, resources, referrals and network-building opportunities related to a variety of topics. The Secretariat can be reached at ohprs@healthnexus.ca.
- Individuals can contact their local public health unit, United Way agency, Social Planning Council and/or government representatives to see how these local groups can support individuals and organizations in advancing these priorities.

Introduction

A comprehensive, systems approach is required to improve health and address the increasing burden of chronic disease in Ontario⁸. A comprehensive approach acknowledges that individual behaviour is influenced by and, in turn, influences institutional, social, and other contexts⁹. A systems approach facilitates stakeholders from different fields but with common interests to work, either separately or in collaboration, in a coordinated manner to achieve an end goal¹⁰. Research supports a systems approach that is coordinated and focuses emphasis on chronic disease prevention to address the costs of chronic disease on health care systems and human society. Ontario requires a systems approach to focus on the prevention of chronic diseases over their management¹¹. To move forward as a system, the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance is asking its members and all community and health practitioners, groups and organizations to focus their efforts on the following approaches to chronic disease prevention:

Addressing multiple risk factors...

The co-relation of multiple risk factors has an exponential impact on chronic disease and must be addressed. Health professionals and practitioners focus on evidence-based approaches that address multiple risk factors.

Across the lifespan....

A lifespan approach to chronic disease prevention and management is necessary to ensure the health of families and communities. Key priority groups include children, adolescents, adults, and seniors – *all of us*.

In multiple settings...

A multi-settings approach is required to reach out to all Ontarians on these issues. Activities and programs should be initiated and operated in schools, workplaces, hospitals, long-term care homes, and communities.

Promoting healthy conditions...

Addressing the social and physical environments which influence Ontarians decisions about their behaviours is essential to reducing chronic diseases and their risk factors at a population level. Policy and environmental supports are the most effective ways to shift social norms, ensure adequate resource and promote healthy conditions and opportunities for health in which Ontarians can live, work and play.

Integrating the social determinants of health...

A determinants of health perspective must be taken in order to address all risk factors and have an impact on all chronic diseases. This perspective can be integrated into individual practice, group advocacy activities and organizational values. Initiatives which support an 'all of government' approach to address the social determinants of health are required. Poverty reduction strategies must be implemented at local and provincial levels to support the health of Ontario's most vulnerable populations.

Risk Factor Specific Priorities and Actions

"Strategies for reducing risk factors for [chronic] diseases aim at providing and encouraging healthy choices for all. They include multi-sectoral actions involving the elaboration of high-level policies and plans as well as programmes related to advocacy, community mobilization, environmental interventions, health system organization and delivery, legislation and regulation."

World Health Organization (2008)¹²

Tobacco

Sustain the provision of comprehensive tobacco control programs that include protection, prevention, and cessation activities through adequate financial investment within a coherent provincial structure.

- ❖ Ensure compliance with the Smoke Free Ontario Act through ongoing education activities and programs including enforcement, and expand bylaws that limit the harmful effects of second-hand smoke at recreation sites, beaches, patios, playgrounds, multi-unit dwelling sites, entrances and exits to municipal buildings and smoke-free health care facility properties.
- ❖ Engage young people in tobacco control programs through community and school settings to denormalize the tobacco industry and its role in product promotion.
- ❖ Reduce youth access and uptake of tobacco products by promoting a system of regular retailer compliance checks involving youth test shoppers and by encouraging zoning and licensing restrictions on tobacco retailers, particularly in low-income and school neighbourhoods.
- ❖ Support tobacco-free lifestyles by increasing the availability of comprehensive tobacco cessation services for youth and adults.

Alcohol

Eliminate the marketing and promotion of high-risk drinking in Ontario

- ❖ Ensure the linkage between high-risk alcohol consumption and the risk of chronic disease is addressed within health promotion programs, materials, school-based curriculum and workplace wellness programs.
- ❖ Work to increase the availability of brief interventions for all who drink above the Low Risk Drinking Guidelines.
- ❖ Take action to keep alcohol pricing in line with the current cost of living.
- ❖ Eliminate alcohol marketing and promotion to children and youth

Healthy Eating

Ensure access to adequate, nutritious, safe and culturally appropriate foods for all Ontarians

- ❖ Increase the availability of healthy foods and food choices (i.e. food from the 4 food groups in Canada's Food Guide) in schools, workplaces and public facilities and limit foods and beverages high in calories, fat, sugar or salt.
- ❖ Ensure access to nutritious food for all Ontarians by using the cost of the "Nutritious Food Basket" (calculated annually by each Public Health Unit) in determining the rates for social assistance and the minimum wage and in the formulation of ODSP/Social Assistance payouts.

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- ❖ Encourage community planning, zoning and funding that supports healthier food choices, develops and promotes the potential of the local food sector, and reduces access to unhealthy food choices, particularly in low-income communities.
- ❖ Ensure individuals have opportunities to develop food selection, food preparation and food safety skills in school and community settings.

Mental Health

Create the conditions necessary for good mental health

- ❖ Address the socioeconomic conditions which promote mental health: social inclusion, freedom from discrimination/violence and access to economic resources
- ❖ Improve people's understanding of and ability to maintain good mental health, recognize mental health problems and get support
- ❖ Increase availability and access to depression screening and early intervention
- ❖ Reduce the stigma associated with mental illness

Physical Activity

Foster action that supports and encourages active living and physical activity.

- ❖ Make active living a priority through the funding and promotion of walking clubs, youth engagement initiatives, corporate challenges, and programs that use active transportation. Encourage community agencies and businesses to finance and actively implement these initiatives.
- ❖ Support and advance community planning and funding that ensures communities are safe and walkable by promoting mixed use of land, green spaces, provision and upkeep of sidewalks, proper lighting, etc.
- ❖ Invest in adequate facilities and programs to promote and ensure access to active living and physical activity (i.e. recreation centres, community trails, swimming facilities, playgrounds, bike paths and school facilities).
- ❖ Improve access to recreational activities and physical education programs for low-income groups and priority populations.

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For more information on the Alliance, please feel free to contact us at ocdpa@opha.on.ca, or visit our website to view our resources at www.ocdpa.on.ca

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References

- ¹ World Health Organization. 2008. *2008-2013 Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non Communicable Diseases*.
- ² Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. 2005.
- ³ World Health Organization. 2008. *2008-2013 Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non Communicable Diseases*.
- ⁴ Haydon E, Roerecke M, Giesbrecht N, Rehm J and Kobus-Matthews M. (2005) *Chronic Disease in Ontario and Canada: Determinants, Risk Factors and Prevention Priorities*.
Institute for Clinical Evaluation Services. (2007). *Neighbourhood Environments and their Resources for Healthy Living – A Focus on Diabetes in Toronto*.
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- ⁵ A socioenvironmental shifts focus away from behavioural risk factors to those socioenvironmental conditions which operate and influence behaviours.
- ⁶ Access refers to the ability of individuals, through income and resources, to purchase or barter obtain items.
- ⁷ Availability refers to the quantities of items within reasonable proximity or reach of individuals to obtain, based on distribution and/or geography.
- ⁸ OCDPA (2006); Robinson K et al (2006); Ontario Health Quality Council (2007);
- ⁹ OCDPA. (2006). *Thinking Like A System: the way forward to prevent chronic disease in Ontario*.
- ¹⁰ OCDPA. (2006). *Thinking Like A System: the way forward to prevent chronic disease in Ontario*
- ¹¹ OCDPA (2006). *Thinking Like A System: the way forward to prevent chronic disease in Ontario*.
- ¹² World Health Organization. 2008. *2008-2013 Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non Communicable Diseases*.