

# Creating a Common Messages Framework for Chronic Disease Prevention in Ontario

## Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance www.ocdpa.on.ca

### What is the Alliance?

The Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (OCDPA), formed in 2003, is a collaborative of organizations that came together to focus on chronic disease prevention and healthy living in a comprehensive manner.

This will be accomplished by focusing on planning and coordination, public policy, advocacy and knowledge exchange, resulting in the following outcomes:

- Chronic disease prevention investments that are well planned and coordinated.
- Public policies which address the prevention of chronic disease.
- Knowledge which is effectively and efficiently created and exchanged.

*"Coordinated and focused emphasis on chronic disease is essential to address the enormity of the burden"*

Derek Yach (2004), *the Global Burden of Chronic Diseases (JAMA)*

### Background

In 2007, the OCDPA undertook a process to identify and develop chronic disease prevention 'messages' to focus attention among internal members and external chronic disease prevention practitioners on the most important issues related to field and to promote action on these issues across Ontario.

### Rationale:

Chronic disease is the leading cause of death and disability in Ontario. While media and research reports abound calling attention to the common risk factors that lead to chronic diseases, messages delivered by NGOs and related networks are mixed, leading to confusion by the recipients. There exists a need for clear, consistent and actionable risk factor and condition messaging that can inform and motivate individuals and society about the root causes of chronic disease.

*"The main factors—the main "determinants" as the experts call them— that will likely shape our health and life space are the ones that affect society as a whole. And if we want Canadians to be the healthiest people in the world, we have to deal with them at that level!"*

Roy Romanow (2004), *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives*

### How the Messages were Developed

Members were engaged in several large group consultations to develop a communications plan. A socioenvironmental approach<sup>1</sup> was adopted to highlight the risk conditions which influence individual and population behaviours and chronic disease risk factors.

The central themes, access<sup>2</sup> and availability<sup>3</sup>, emerged as a framing mechanism for messaging. Field practitioners were identified as the main target audience.

### Messaging Criteria

The OCDPA identified criteria to frame and prioritize its messages.

1. Estimated impact to reduce burden
2. Alignment with Ministry guidelines/strategies
3. Evidence-informed
4. Strategic, high opportunity
5. Common priorities with impact on multiple outcomes
6. Addresses gap in current field
7. Opportunity for practitioners to provide leadership around issue
8. Builds or lends to credibility of Alliance

### Messaging

Messages in the form of policy and environmental support statements were drafted to address all major, modifiable risk factors: tobacco control, alcohol misuse, healthy eating, physical activity and depression. These messages are currently being refined for approval and dissemination.

General chronic disease prevention messages were identified and approved through consultations. These messages include the need for practitioners to:

- Understand the exponential impact of multiple risk factors on chronic disease
- Support individuals across the lifespan
- Apply a social determinants of health perspective
- Employ activities in multiple settings
- Address environmental supports through their work

### Next Steps

In Phase 2 of this project, the OCDPA will work on developing a messaging framework to support message utilization, tracking and dissemination. Background papers, webinars and workshops are currently under development to assist with dissemination of the messages, enhance awareness of the issues and promote utilization among chronic disease prevention practitioners.

If you would like more information on this project, please contact [ocdpa@opha.on.ca](mailto:ocdpa@opha.on.ca)

### Footnote

- 1) A socio-environmental shifts focus away from behavioural risk factors to those social and environmental conditions which operate and influence choice and behaviours.
- 2) Access refers to the ability of individuals, through income and resources, to purchase or barter to obtain items.
- 3) Availability refers to the quantities of items within reasonable proximity or reach of individuals to obtain, based on distribution and/or geography.