



September 24, 2012

Dr. Samir Sinha
Provincial Lead, Seniors Care Strategy
(via e-mail: samir.sinha@ontario.ca)

Dear Dr. Sinha:

Re: Seniors Care Strategy – Submission of the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH)

On behalf of the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH), we are pleased to provide the following recommendations for the Seniors Care Strategy which was recently outline in Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care.

OSNPPH is the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians in public health in Ontario. OSNPPH provides leadership in public health nutrition, promoting and supporting member collaboration to improve the health for older adults living in Ontario consistent with the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care's Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS). While the OPHS address falls prevention in this population only, we feel there are other considerations that can be made to enhance the health and well being of seniors:

- Plan to sustain efforts. With an aging population, more public health nutrition programs and services need to change the focus from individual health behaviours and personal responsibility to more upstream factors associated with Social Determinants of Health, especially poverty, literacy/education, childcare, housing, transportation, income, and social support networks. To ensure evidence-informed and effective strategies are implemented effectively, dedicated staff and resources are required.
- Support appropriate indicators of nutritional status in seniors. Registered Dietitians in public health can contribute to the surveillance, analysis, and reporting of the nutritional status of older adults through inclusion of appropriate food and nutrition indicators in provincial accountability agreements with public health units. Support additional research, evaluation, and monitoring and development of effective tools, and increase incorporation of meaningful measures that already exist, including SCREEN[®] and Nutritious Food Basket.
- Leverage the expertise of Registered Dietitians in public health. Registered Dietitians in public health have unique knowledge, skills, expertise and competence to design and guide evidence-based senior care strategies at local and provincial levels. OSNPPH encourages the Provincial Lead to draw upon our specialized skill sets to advise upon healthy eating recommendations. The capacity of Registered Dietitians across the health sector, including public health, requires enhancement and support. This will operationalize important work addressing the nutritional health of older adults.
- Address the "poverty" of poverty-induced food insecurity. Seniors struggling under poverty-induced food insecurity need income-related responses, rather than food charity. Low-cost foods tend to be of poor nutritional value but high-calorie. Increase utilization of the Nutritious



Food Basket data collected annually by public health units to help determine incomes adequate for basic necessities (e.g., healthy eating and housing), such as incomes from social assistance and minimum wage.

- Explore food skills' relationship to seniors' health. It is likely that poor health among the senior population can be related to limited food skills which may result from social isolation, the loss of a partner, or simply not having the opportunity to practice these life skills. However, planning to address food skills is greatly hampered by a lack of research, including the link between food skills and the chronic diseases. Food skills and literacy include all aspects of food preparation (e.g., planning, procurement, preparation, enjoyment of the eating experience) as well as having adequate equipment and tools. Continue to support and provide public health funds dedicated to food skills research, resources, and programming, such as the Locally Driven Collaborative Project – Food Skills, which is led by OSNPPH members.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to Seniors Care Strategy. We are pleased to see the Ontario Government is making this issue a priority and look forward to the opportunity to contribute to improving and enhancing health outcomes for Ontario seniors.

Sincerely,

Shannon Edmonstone, MAN, RD
Co-Chair
(519) 271-9375 ext 777
sedmonstone@pdhu.on.ca

Heather Thomas, PhD, RD
Co-Chair
(519) 663-5317 ext 2222
heather.thomas@mlhu.on.ca